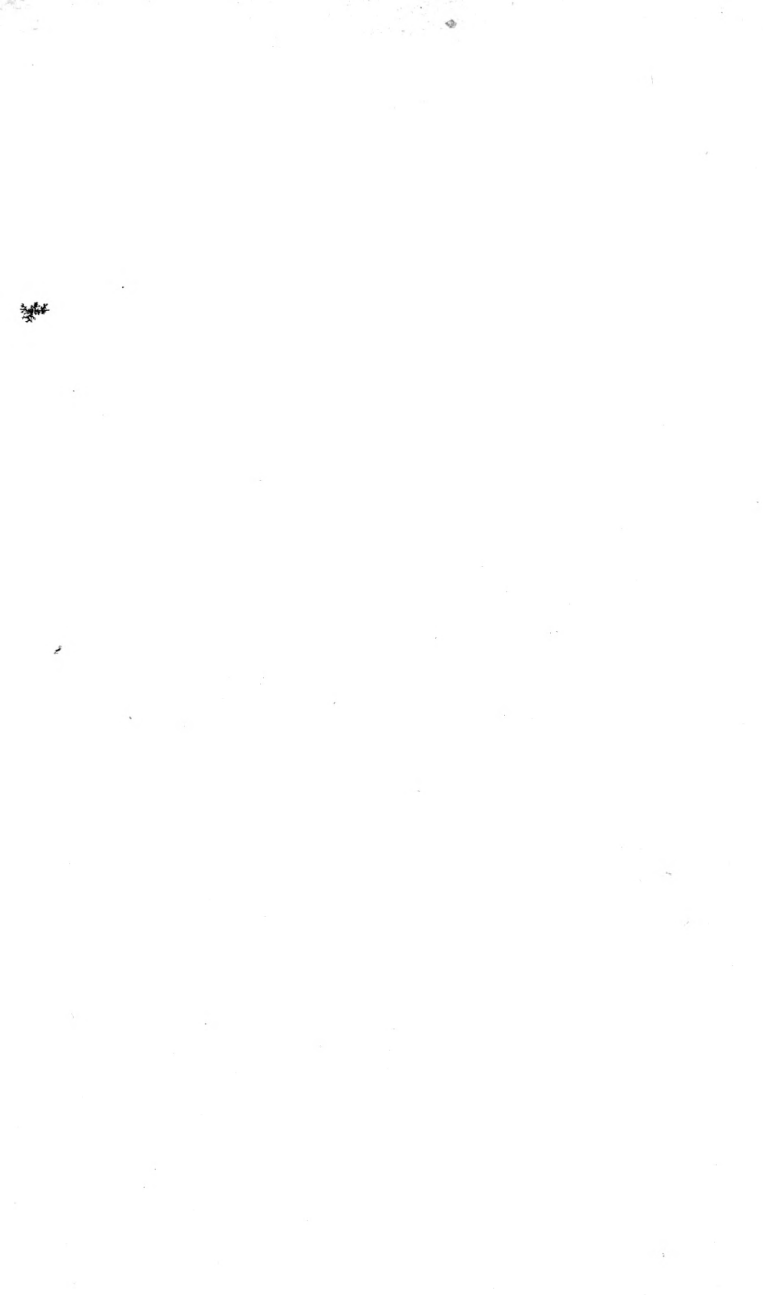


LIBRARY
OF THE
UNIVERSITY
OF ILLINOIS

823
C923
v. 3



THE CURATE OF SADBROOKE.

VOL. III.

THE CURATE OF SADBROOKE.

"At least, not rotting like a weed,
But having sown some generous seed,
Fruitful in further thought and deed."
TENNYSON'S "*Two Voices*."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
SUCCESSORS TO HENRY COLBURN,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.
1865.

The right of Translation is reserved.

LONDON:

PRINTED BY MACDONALD AND TUGWELL, BLENHEIM HOUSE,
BLENHEIM STREET, OXFORD STREET.

823
C-3
13



THE CURATE OF SADBROOKE.

CHAPTER I.

THE SAILING OF THE "LADY BERTHA."

VERY busily went on the work of putting her freight on board the *Lady Bertha*. The sail-cloth, the ropes, the nets, were all brought down from the store to the pier, and barrows were incessantly running up and down the steep planks to the vessel's side, when they were unladen, and the goods packed away securely in the hold.

The wind was fair for down channel, east, with just a point to the north, and the cap-

tain was very anxious to sail as soon as possible. It was all on board at last ; the crew, five men and a boy, were ready. The order for the goods had been given by a firm at a Northern port, and the owners wished to have the vessel back in time to take her first voyage across the Atlantic ; so all were anxious that there should be no delay.

The morning broke ruddy and golden in the east, the colours shining brightly upon the waters, and glancing upon the square rigging of the vessel, where the men were busy putting up the sails, and finishing the little that was left to be done, but which always seems sufficient to make the sailing of a vessel, whether large or small, such a scene of bustle, and, to those who do not know what is going on, of confusion.

The children were down on the pier looking at " father's ship," waiting for a last kiss from father, and the boys, even tiny little fellows, taking an interest in the whole proceeding,

that pretty well told what would be their own future choice. The captain's wife, and the wives of one or two others, were there also ; several sailors, and altogether a larger number of people than usual, were collected to see her sail, for the *Lady Bertha* was the largest vessel that had ever been launched from Sadport ; and now that she was about to leave on her first voyage, there were many on-lookers, watching to see how she would behave—whether the judgment that each had formed respecting her sailing qualities would be the correct one ; how she would answer her helm, how she would sail, and how she would behave altogether.

“ Fair wind for down channel, cap'en,” said a man.

“ Ay ! ay !—all right !” was the reply.

“ You'll need to look out ; this 'ere wind ain't going to hold,” said an old sailor.

“ You's always a-croaking Jack,” said a woman ; “ a beautiful morn like this, who

but you would ever be a-finding fault."

"Too fine to hold—them's my ideas," replied the sailor, holding to his opinion.

"The reds were up this morn, for sartain ; there'll be a change afore long," said another old sailor.

The captain heard the remarks, so did the sailors ; but if their own opinions held with those of the speakers, nothing was said to show it.

"Her be a new vessel, that's one comfort," said a woman. "Some on 'em be sich reg'lar old tubs, they ain't fit to send a cat to sea in, let alone Christians, as they do oft-times."

"Yes ; her's new, so her ropes 'ill be stiff, and they won't know much about her ways, nor how to handle her the first time," said a man, who was looked upon as a regular grumbler, and whose opinion had therefore not much weight.

But the sailors put up their glasses, and

scanned the horizon, and shook their heads ; the weather was not settled, it was not likely to hold fair, it would have been well had the vessel sailed sooner ; she would certainly meet a gale, and, in all probability a heavy one.

But there was no Admiral Fitzroy to put up storm signals thirty years ago ; had there been, he would probably not have been attended to, as is often the case now. So, notwithstanding the captain's own doubts respecting the weather, and the forebodings of many others, the anchor was heaved up, the cable unfastened, the sails set, the pilot took the helm, starboard and larboard were heard, and the *Lady Bertha*, a fine, handsome vessel, somewhat deep in the water, went out of harbour, rounding the old wooden piers of Sadport, and cutting through the blue water that parted to make way, leaving a long white track after her as she went on.

As she faded from sight, growing less and

less in the distance, the anxious eyes that had watched her were withdrawn—the people who had been collected dropped off one by one—the women went home, taking their children by the hand, and leading them back; they returned to their household work. The sailors talked a little in the intervals of smoking about the new vessel and her cargo, and how much her owners would make by it; and then went home to dinner.

She had sailed about six hours, when the wind, which had been for some time very unsteady, went completely round to the south-west; it veered backwards and forwards several times, rising and then again falling in sweeping gusts, the vane every now and then swinging almost round; but it finally settled in that stormy dangerous quarter. Thick, blinding rain fell, the storm waxed louder and higher, the sailors called it dirty weather, and likely for a wild night—everything portended a heavy gale.

“The *Lady Bertha* had better ha’ stop’t where she were.”

“Whatever they gived her such a outlandish heathenish name for, no one can’t think—’twould bring no luck.”

“’Twas like her’d be at the bottom afore another morn broke.”

Such were the opinions of many.

The evening came on wilder and darker, the wind moaned and howled, the sea lashed and broke against the old wooden piers, and, as the tide rose, swept completely over them. The wives of the men who were on board went on with their usual avocations, the customary routine of daily life, in that strange way that people generally do, even in intense anxiety and distress. The children had their suppers and were put to bed, to be rocked to sleep by the shaking of their frail cottages, and lulled by the screaming of the tempest. But strive to think of it as they would, and hoping amid it all, there was still sorrow and distress that

night for all who had friends on board the *Lady Bertha*.

With the first early dawn there were many collected on the pier; the tide had gone back, but the wind was very little lulled—it still whistled, as though its work were not yet done; the sailors all said it would rise again with the tide.

“’Tweren’t many a vessel as could ha’ rode it out last night,” said one, “though her’s not one of they old rats’ castles as they sometimes sends out, never a-caring for the lives aboard; her timbers will stand a good strain, but they’ve been pretty well tried for sartain.”

“She’s new, yes,” said another reflectively; “but then ’tis her first voyage, and they don’t know her ways, that goes agin her in such a gale as this ’ere.”

“’Tis their having named her arter that ’ere old witch woman whot lived back in the days of pope and pagan that I likes least,” said an old sailor, with the superstition of his class.

“I’d never a-sailed in her, never; her’ll come to a bad end yet, you marks my word for it.”

It was scarcely light, but the dawn was breaking, so different from that of the morning before. Then the sun had risen red and fiery over a high bank of black clouds, on which it almost appeared to rest, and which seemed to concentrate the light, and send it down in brighter colours from the contrast. Now it was pale and dull-looking, every now and then shooting out gleams of light that shone with a kind of watery lustre, and gave no promise of better things. Still, as it rose higher, dark as the day was, objects began to be distinguished; at first, those near at hand, then those further off; then in a moment the sweeping rain would shut out everything like a distant view; but notwithstanding being so overcast; the sun rose higher and higher in the heavens; and as each shower passed, or the wind drove away the mist for a few minutes, the men put up their glasses, making

the most of every opportunity, scanning the horizon anxiously in search of any unhappy vessel that might be exposed to the fury of the tempestuous winds and waters, and especially looking for that one which only yesterday had left the harbour in such trim state.

After a while, a glass was seen pointing steadily for some time to one particular spot; and a man drawing a long breath, said, in the low decided voice of one who had been long considering, and was at length sure he was right—

“That’s her, I b’lieves; her’s driving up channel.”

Glass after glass followed in the same direction.

“’Tis a vessel in distress a-beating about; there’s no telling what her be, the rain drives down so.”

“’Tis her,” returned the first speaker, taking his glass from his eye, and handing it to a friend; “I thinks I’m right; they’s

trying to keep her head to sea, but if the wind rises agen, they'll never a-manage it."

The man who took the glass looked long and anxiously before he gave any opinion.

"I b'lieves you're right, Jem," he said; "'tis her build, so far as one can see, and it's like her cap'en the way her's a-going; he'll be game to the last, and try for the best; but they can't stand out to sea, her's too near in shore—her's nearer than when we seed her first."

The first man took the glass again.

"She's driving in hard; they may try, poor souls! God help 'em! there's no use trying in such a storm as this."

A woman came up.

"Is it the vessel?" she said. She was shaking with cold and fear; she could scarcely speak.

"We scarce knows yet," was the reply; "there's a vessel out there—it mayn't be

they; and if it be, they may round into harbour yet."

The speaker put up the glass for her, and steadied it; she could not hold it—she tried to look, but could see nothing; her head swam, and her eyes were misty with tears. The man took the glass again.

"Her's driving in hard—this south wind's too much for 'em."

"No, her head's to sea again."

"So 'tis, sure!" was the reply.

But it was not long doubtful. No human efforts could resist the power of the driving wind; it was not many minutes ere she was seen plainly by the naked eye, as a small speck at first on the water, then she became distinctly visible, tossing upon the wild tossing water, then with the glass the figures on board could be discerned.

"Her's running in, sure!—they'll make for the cliffs!—they can't round into harbour!—they'd only strike the pier's head,

and it's deeper water there, and that's a worse chance."

"Her can't round into harbour!" was echoed through the crowd.

They left the pier, running on to the part of the cliff where it was now clear the vessel would strike. She was evidently unmanageable; she had been striving gallantly to make for the harbour, but there was no hope now; the sea was washing over her decks; she drove straight on her way, straight in upon the heavy shingle. The crew took to the rigging, to save being washed overboard.

"They may be saved yet wi' a rope—there's no good launching a boat, it couldn't be got off."

"The tide's coming in—her may drive up yet."

There was quite a crowd collected now—the poor women seeing their husbands and sons on board the devoted vessel, knew

that a very short time would decide whether they would reach the land in safety, or whether they would sink beneath those seething billows. She came on with the speed almost of lightning—the tide was driving her now, as well as the wind; she was getting into shallow water—she gave plunge after plunge, then one heavier than the others; again she recoiled, like a wild horse starting back in terror, then one more plunge, and there she lay, rocking to and fro, first to one side, and then to the other, the men clinging to the rigging for dear life.

“Her’s struck, but her may go off yet,” was said.

She was so near, it seemed almost as if you could have touched her with your hand; but she rocked to and fro in such a manner, they could hardly throw a rope, and the hungry waves leaped up upon the shingle, and then swept back again, recoiling, as it were, in disappointment, like demons who

had won no prey, deep calling unto deep to come on again to the encounter. As the waves went back, the men ran out with ropes, holding one another in a long string. Several times they failed, the waves dashing them back before they could throw a rope; but they at length succeeded, and all worked hard, those on shore, and those on board. One by one, wet and weary, stiff and cold, hardly able to grasp the rope on which their safety depended, were they drawn on shore; one by one, one after another, the captain last—*four men and the boy!* The women were there, waiting, sobbing, to receive them as they fell into their arms, safe home again after their perilous voyage; and still the vessel lay there, rocking, rocking, as if she must go to pieces!

“Where’s Bill?” said the wife of one of the men who had sailed in her the day before.

He had been missed by all; many eyes had been straining to look for him, but none had

strained like hers. Pitying glances were thrown on her.

“Where’s Bill?” she screamed, louder than before.

“Don’t ’ee take on, there’s a dear soul!” said one of the rescued men, coming up and speaking to her.

“Who’s a-taking on?—I’m not—I’m a-axing for Bill!”

The captain came up and took her hand.

“We must all go one time or another,” said he; “we none of us know which will go first.”

“Who’s a-talking of going?—I’m not a-going. I com’d here to look for Bill, and I ax you where he be?”

She would not understand that which was so plainly put before her. The welcomes were hushed and quieted—all were looking at the poor creature, as she stood there in her utter misery. A few women gathered round her.

“ He was washed off in the night by a wave,” said the captain at last ; “ we could do nothing—it might have been any of us—it was a fearful night ! ”

“ And you left him there out in they waters ? ” and she pointed out to the wild, relentless sea ; “ you didn’t a-put out a rope !—you didn’t a-send out a boat !—you comed in all safe !—safe, all of you !—and you left him out there in they waters !—out there !—out—there ! ”

The words fell more as if they were being thrown out of her lips, than as if they were spoken by a human being ; they came heavier and duller, with greater space between each ; her eyes glazed, and she fell back into the arms of the bystanders, and was carried home ; to be laid down in the deep insensibility which a merciful Providence had sent, to shroud in some manner the agony of the first hour of widowhood.

To-day and yesterday ! Oh ! what a trite

remark—too trite, too commonplace almost to be allowable ; yet in real life, how startling is oftentimes the contrast. The cottage through whose window panes the low winter sun of yesterday morning streamed in, colouring everything in brightness, lighting up the cups and saucers, playing with dancing light on the little looking-glass, shedding hope on the parting, and making bright even the farewells, now lay in darkness and in shadow ; the mourning and wailing of the children, and the wild rain and tempest driving against the lattice, failing alike to rouse the mother from her death-like swoon, or the father, who only yesterday left in health and strength, and who was now lying unshrouded and uncoffined beneath the foaming waters, till the day when the sea shall give up her dead.

Shortly after the men were got off, the wind lulled, the afternoon was very fine and pleasant for a winter day, and the setting sun shone out bright and clear. The next day,

at the low tide, part of the cargo was taken out of the ship, and returned to the store; and as the tide rose, coming in full and high, as it does at the spring tides, especially after a storm, she was floated off, and brought round into the harbour once again, to her old moorings, much less injured than could have been expected. The day was a very bright one; everything was going on just as usual; it was scarcely possible to think she had ever sailed, all looked so exactly the same as before; and so it was to everyone except the widow and her fatherless children.





CHAPTER II.

ALICE LECTURES THE CURATE.

JANUARY had passed away, and the month of February was more than half through, and still James had not yet been equal to going again to Sadbrooke ; he hoped in a week or two to resume his usual duties, but although he was getting round, he was still far from strong ; and as the friend who had served his church during his illness was able to continue doing so for one or two more Sundays, there was no need for him to exert himself too soon. But he was beginning to be very anxious about the parish and his school, and

said he must go over and see the place again, it would do him good to get out into the country. So, knowing his wish, Alice said to him, one fine morning, at breakfast :

“If you like to go to Sadbrooke this fine morning, James, and feel well enough, I will drive you over in the pony-carriage.”

“Thank you,” was the reply; “I was thinking of going. If you are inclined to drive me over, I shall like it very much, I hope to walk over again in a few days; but you know the mistress always likes to see you, she thinks me of very little use in the world, and so I suppose I am; but I shall soon be strong, and about just as usual.”

“Pray, James, don’t exert yourself too much,” entreated Mrs. Knightly; “you were so much worse after taking that short walk, and Mr. Mills said it was all over-fatigue.”

“Dr. Smith says, my dear, it will do him good to get out a little,” said Mr. Knightly. “If Alice drives him over, it cannot be any

fatigue ; and the ponies are quite quiet now, she can manage them very well."

They all talked as to what he was to do, and he was very passive in the matter ; but he did wish to go over to Sadbroke once more, and just look at it ; he should certainly leave soon—he felt every day, more and more, that he must do so ; he should never recover whilst he remained at Sadborough.

So the brother and sister set out. The ponies had been out a good deal of late, and went on very steadily ; it was one of those fresh, bright mornings, which are so lovely in the early spring ; the grass was beginning to look more green ; there was a primrose—harbinger of the future—to be seen here and there in sheltered nooks ; "the first blue violet of the leafless spring" hid its fair head as much as possible, but was yet to be found, if carefully looked for ; the birds were twittering their first early notes, an earnest of the full chorus that should, ere long, fill the air

with the sound of tuneful voices ; but as yet the white frost was laying on the ground, and the wind, in shady places, was still cold and cutting.

Alice certainly thought the drive would do her brother good, but she had a purpose of her own in suggesting it, a something to say to him, that she hoped and believed would do more to restore him than the breath of the fresh air, the sight of the spring flowers, or the early chirping of the birds. She was altogether greatly dissatisfied with his conduct towards Maude. She had hoped, after Hugh left, matters would have come right again ; but this had not been the case, and his illness, although it had evidenced to her more than ever Maude's strong attachment for him, had still not brought them together, and the estrangement was becoming greater every day. She did not at all like the idea of interfering, and had put off doing so as long as she could ; but now she was too really

anxious respecting all parties concerned, not to endeavour to put things on a better footing, if possible.

When they were fairly off, her heart began to sink at the difficulty of the task she had set herself ; but she was determined not to let the opportunity slip, and so nerved herself up, and entered upon the undertaking with, perhaps, somewhat more than her accustomed energy.

“ I hoped Maude would have driven with us to-day ; I ran in to ask her, but she did not feel inclined,” she began.

“ I suppose she preferred staying at home, it is rather cold !” was the reply.

“ I do not think she is looking well,” was the next attempt.

“ I see nothing the matter, she seems well enough. I suppose she will not care much to come to Fairleigh now ?”

“ Why not ?” was asked, rather sharply.

“ Oh ! your thoughts are preoccupied ; and

Hugh has left, I do not see there is anything to bring her."

This was enough ; Alice opened fire immediately.

"James, how very, very foolish you are ; and what a dreadful mistake you have been making all this time !"

"What mistake ?"

He did not choose to understand, though his heart beat a little quicker.

"Not to know Maude better, after having been together all your lives, as you have been."

"I had rather change the subject, Alice ; Maude does not care for me, and that is quite enough," said her brother.

"You chose to shun her, and then were affronted because she did not run after you," was said rather spitefully.

"As you insist on continuing the conversation, I repeat that Maude does not care for me. When Hugh came home, it was evident

how much he admired her ; and I then saw that, young as she is, she ought to be allowed to see others besides myself, before entangling herself in an engagement that she might afterwards regret. Had I acted otherwise, it would have been presuming upon our early intimacy, and would have, in all probability, ended in disappointment for both."

"And so you sacrificed poor dear Hugh ! just for the sake of knowing that Maude preferred you, after having had other admirers ? Oh ! James, you have acted very, very wrongly indeed ; he would never have thought any more of her than as a sister, as he did before, if he had been once aware of your attachment ; but, of course, he thought there was no previous affection on your part, by your conduct in behaving as you have done ! Poor dear Hugh ! all alone among those dry law-books, how I do pity him !"

"But it was only fair by Hugh, to give

him an equal chance with myself, and leave Maude to decide."

"You men are all just alike—that is, most of you," replied the fair arguer, now veering round unexpectedly on a wholly different tack; "you think only of yourselves and each other, as if a woman could transfer her affections just as she chose. I have no doubt Maude would have been very glad indeed if she could have forgotten you, when she saw how you had forgotten her; but it was impossible, quite impossible, for such a girl as she is to change in a minute."

The unfortunate Curate of Sadbroke! He thought he had been acting in the matter so rightly, and with such real self-denial! He certainly would not have made himself so miserable, had he not considered there was just cause; and now to hear that he had been playing with two other human hearts besides his own, hearts equally capable of feeling and

of suffering as his own ! At least, such was the accusation now brought against him. He had allowed Hugh to bask himself day after day in the sunshine of Maude's bright eyes, merely that his own proud, exacting love, might be quite sure that it had not been given unrequited, and wholly reckless of what the consequences might be to him ; and if what Alice said was true, why, then, Hugh had been undoubtedly ill-used, and to say his brother was very sorry, is not enough—he was truly, deeply grieved.

Then he had made Maude miserable for some weeks, but that did not affect him by any means in an uncomfortable way. Men, the very best of them, are sufficiently tyrants, rather to like the inflicting a little suffering when they have been enduring the same themselves ; besides, it was a tie between them, so he bore that thought very stoically.

“ I cannot go to the school to-day, Alice,” he said. “ If you like it we can drive home

round over the bridge; I must settle this matter at once."

They were silent for some little distance. Alice was an affectionate, warm-hearted girl; notwithstanding her own love affair, she had plenty of love left for her brothers, and James she was extremely fond of; it would have been actual grief to her, even amid her own happiness, had anything permanently divided him from Maude. She had been extremely vexed to see Hugh so drawn on day after day, and to observe his admiration ripening into real affection; but she felt that as yet it was a very different thing with him from that deep, passionate love that James entertained, which, having grown with his growth, and strengthened with his strength, would have made it almost impossible for him to have remained in England had Maude been married to another. But having now presented to her brother's lips what she was well aware was a cup very brimful of happiness, she, with a true woman's

instinct, began to pour in the one drop that she well knew would, in some measure, still the effervescence, and prevent its completely overflowing. Besides, it was in her nature to feel for the unhappy. James would not want her sympathy long; and the vision of the lonely student, poring over his dry law books, always a pitiful one for a woman's consideration, arose full before her.

Her thoughts were continually recurring to another student; but then deep in her heart was the full belief that he had the lamp of love in addition to the dim oil one to comfort him; and the thought of her brother, who had been nursing up a little spark, just to have it extinguished, was indeed a very sad one for Alice.

So all the way home the refrain of her conversation was—"That poor, dear Hugh, and those dreadful law books!"

James went immediately to the Grange. It matters little whether he found Maude alone

in the drawing-room, or whether he went to look for her in the greenhouse, or asked her to take a walk in the garden. He was not going to be turned from his purpose now ; it is sufficient to say, that he did find her, and that he found also that all Alice had said was very true. But it is not well strangers should be witnesses to the troth plight between two young hearts.

The engagement gave great satisfaction, but was the cause of very little surprise to either of the families, much to the astonishment of the parties principally concerned.

“ I always hoped it might be so, Maude, my love,” said her mother. “ I could not be deceived in the matter, I felt sure.”

“ How could you think so, mamma ?” said she, opening her blue eyes with wonder.

“ I have wished for it a long while, my dear ; but that morning when you said James asked you to go and see the sick boy, I felt sure of the state of affairs.”

“You are just suited to make James happy, my love!” said Alice, kissing her, when next they met, which she managed to contrive should be as soon as possible. “I never did believe that two such loving hearts could be separated. I am so very very glad it is all so happily settled at last!”

James was anxious to write to his brother by the same day's post; he felt it was only due to him not to delay; but it was a difficult letter to write in a satisfactory way. First he wrote a rather short one, entering into home doings, and telling him of his engagement at the end in a few words; this was burnt. Then he began another, in which he said a good deal about his own foolish conduct at Christmas; this was torn up when it was about half finished; and he finally wrote a letter in which he said how long, and truly he had been attached to Maude—that he had doubted her feelings towards himself, and was

only aware that morning that the love was reciprocal. He wrote at once to the brother who had always been the sharer of his secrets ; and should be very glad to hear from him in reply.—He was by no means pleased with the letter, but it was the best he could write—it would save Hugh the humiliating feeling of thinking they looked on him as a rejected lover, which would be an additional pang.

He anxiously expected the answer ; it came by return of post. Hugh wrote on the spur of the moment ; he felt that if he did not, he should probably leave it undone altogether. He did not mention Maude, but congratulated his brother on the prospect of happiness, which he felt none better deserved, or would be more able to appreciate.

“ For himself, he was so very busy, he had hardly time to write those few lines ; he was working so hard, they must not expect at home to hear often from him, nor look out for him at Easter.”

It was a very heavy disappointment ; something more than a disappointment—it was Hugh's first trial, and, for a time, a very hard one ; but he worked hard, lived through it, and was probably none the worse for its effect. But his image, with the lamp and the law books, often came up before Alice ; and in her letters to Hamilton there was generally an inquiry for, and a request that he would look after “ that poor, dear Hugh ! ”





CHAPTER III.

MOLLY.

A FEW evenings after the occurrence related in the last chapter, James Knightly went down to Duck Lane to see Tom. He had not been there since his accident, and the happiness and the excitement of the last few days had in a small degree thrown him back again; but he was fairly in the right way towards recovery now. The doctors no longer complained that he was too quiet; he by no means felt so extremely old as he had done the last few weeks. Life seemed a very bright thing to him, after all; and when he was able to go to Sadbrooke, he found there

was so very much to be done there, that he was by no means sure it would be right for him to go as a missionary.

He was busy arranging plans with Mr. Saxon respecting an evening class, and other matters at Sadborough. The rector was very glad to see him so much himself again; then joked a little, in his dry way, at the cause of his recovery; and, having entertained himself in that manner, told him he might do anything he liked in the matter of teaching and visiting, so that he did not make himself ill again. And with this permission the curate was bent on going to work in earnest.

He went on down Fivefinger Street, and as he past a lamp-post saw a girl leaning against it. She watched him go on, and he rather wondered why she was standing there out in the wet.

He was received with a warm welcome from all the Martins. Poor Tom, who was very weak, could not keep from crying, it was

such a pleasure to see him there again—such a blessing to see him so far restored to health.

“Though you does look terrible pale, sir, still,” said Nanny, thinking, as all of her class do, that she would not be paying him proper attention if she did not make the remark ; and it was in some measure true—he had not recovered his strength, and showed it very plainly. He was told how often Maude had been, and how kind she was to Tom. They had no idea that this conversation would be particularly pleasing to him ; but it was so, nevertheless. He remained there about half an hour, and then left.

As he came out of the cottage, he was aware of a shadow following him, and heard a light step on the pavement. He felt sure it was the girl he had seen standing under the lamp-post as he came down, the pretty little daughter of the one-eyed man, whom he had seen at Widow Brown’s, and had often noticed

following people with her long string of laces, and her bunches of tin skewers, in the streets of Sadborough. He thought she was watching him as he came down, and now, by following him again, she was doubtless going to beg, so he felt in his pocket for some halfpence, and held them out towards her. She did not notice, however—perhaps it was too dark for her to do so. He wondered at this, for regular beggars, one of whom he considered her to be, can generally tell at all lights when anything is offered to them. She came up to him, and spoke, her voice sounding more hoarse and strained than was even usual to her.

“Plase, sir, were Jack Martin at home this night?”

“Yes—no—oh! I believe he was, though,” he replied, abstractedly.

He walked on, she still following; the answer had not been sufficiently decided to satisfy her.

“Were Jack Martin at home when you

was there just now, if you please, sir?" she inquired again.

What could the girl want with Jack?—to draw him into mischief, no doubt. It had been a bad day, he felt sure, for the Browns when these people came to them; he hoped they would not draw Jack into evil ways, too. Probably her father had sent her to decoy him out, that he might join them in poaching, or something even worse, and she did not like to go into the cottage openly; but then it was very strange she should ask him the question. However, it made him recollect what he had not thought of particularly before, that Jack, contrary to his usual custom, had been in the whole time.

"It can be no business whatever of yours where Jack Martin is," he said; "here are some halfpence—take them, and go home.

Still she did not offer to take the money, but repeated the question.

“I axed you, if you plase, sir, were Jack Martin at home this night?”

He put the halfpence back into his pocket, and walked on ; he was certainly not going to tell her. He had almost come to the corner turning out of the dark lane, when, before he was aware of what she was doing, or could prevent it, the girl was in front of him, and falling down on her knees on the cold, wet, dirty pavement, was clinging to him to prevent his going on. He could not move, except by actually throwing her down ; they were still in the shade, but the light from the lamp at the corner fell partially on her face ; yet it was more by intuition than by sight that he was aware of the pleading look of the deep-set eyes. She was speaking quickly, hurriedly, even more so than usual, her hoarse voice sounding almost unearthly, and the Irish brogue and expressions mingled from her excitement even more than was generally the case in her speech.

“By the love of God, and of the holy Virgin, yer rivirence, as ye hopes for mercy yourself one day—and it’s not just yer being a praste as will save ye—I ax ye once more were Jack Martin at home this night?”

Thus adjured, he answered to the purpose.

“I was not thinking of Jack when you first spoke; but I remember that he came in immediately after I did. I left him in the cottage, sitting in a corner. But get up, pray, and why do you ask me the question?”

She got up slowly and wearily; the flash of excitement had burnt quite out; she always spoke quickly in her strange hoarse voice, but her words now fell very heavily.

“You gentlefolks goes home to your fine houses, with the carpets and curtains, and candles a-flashing, and fires a-blazing in the rooms, and you’ve plenty to eat, and to drink, and the music a-playing, and beautiful ladies to look on ye, and you forgets we as lives

down in such places as this, as to who goes out, or comes in, and I wished you to mind, that were all."

It was a very unusual thing for him to exculpate himself from any charge, but he did answer this strange child.

"I have not been at home this evening enjoying myself. I came out on purpose to come here and see Tom. I saw you as I came down in the next street, and you must know I have been there more than half an hour."

Her interest in the conversation had evidently died out as soon as she received the answer to her question, but she replied—

"Yes, I saw you pass, and I watched you go into the Martins', and I've been waiting ever since to see you come out."

"Then if you have been watching their door, you must have seen Jack go in yourself; why did you ask me about him? If you refuse to answer, I shall think it my duty to

give you in charge to some one who will make you give your reason."

"You can do as you likes; it don't matter for me; Mrs. Martin says I'm dying, just like Tom, and she knows for sartain."

When she knelt before him, the dim light of the lamp barely sufficed to show the exquisite contour of the face, and the earnest pleading of her eyes; but that hoarse strained voice, and the weary manner, certainly spoke of illness.

"It is very wrong that you should be running about the streets in this way; you ought to be at school; are you going back to Sadbroke to-night?"

"I don't live at Sadbroke now; I stops wi' a woman in Sun Court; I never went to school; I've other things to mind."

"Well, I shall call and see the woman you live with, and try to do something for you."

"You may come if you likes; if you means me any harm, it's I as will forgive you

for it; and if you means me any good, it's the Lord as will bless you; but if good ever comes to me, Parson Knightly, it's not you as have brought it, or have axed for it; it's just poor Tom, who sits over the fire with his fingers ofttimes blue with the cold, and his head aching with the pain, who have read to me out of that blessed Book, and have taught me the words of it."

"I am very glad you go to see Tom, and that he reads to you. I shall go again to see him in a few days. I hope you will be there."

"May be I will if I can, but I don't know—perhaps I'll be out wi' the laces, but you needn't mind me. If ever a blessing do light on me from above, 'tis not parson or praste as have brought it, but only poor Tom, who lives here in Duck Lane, who have told me of One as loves him, and who says I'm to seek the Lord airnestly, for that sure and He loves me too."

She spoke very rapidly, crossing herself at the same time; it was her old habit, and she did it involuntarily.

He had been listening intently; it was an illustration of his favourite theory—"Let him that heareth say come!" and he felt deeply thankful that the message so given had been again accepted. He laid his hand on the shawl that covered her long, beautiful hair.

"May you find Him, poor child!" he said.

Notwithstanding her previous words, she stood reverently as receiving his blessing.

He spoke again.

"You do seem very ill. If you will come with me to the nearest shop I will give you some tea and sugar."

"Not now, not this night, another time, maybe. I only axed ye a question, and you've gived me the right answer; may the Lord in heaven bless ye!"

It was her usual formula, but it was more than a formula now. She glided past him,

going into the darkness, which shrouded her like a black veil, but he could just see that she turned into Sun Court. She went into the house, and up into the room formerly occupied by Widow Brown. The woman with whom she lived spoke to her sharply.

“Where have you been, stopping out to this time—in no good, that’s for sartain? You’ll be in mischief of some sort soon, though I don’t think as you’ll live for it.”

She looked at the wan face.

“There, dry your shawl, do, and get into bed, you’ll be dead wi’ the cold and the damp.”

She did as she was bid very quietly, without replying; her limbs ached terribly, but she was pretty well satisfied with her evening’s work.

“They be such a lot, they Martins,” said she to herself. “I doubt if he’d ever have minded which of ’em was at home, if I hadn’t spoke to him; but it’s life and death, I

reckons, now, I knows enough to know that, and I don't think he'll harm me, though it don't matter now; Mrs. Martin says I'm dying just like Tom, and she knows, for sartain. And Tom," so her thoughts ran on, "says he's going home; Jack don't care for me, I'd like to go home too!"

She fell asleep, but it was broken rest; she started up once or twice as if in terror, calling "Jack!"

The woman shook her head.

"Her won't be here long, and a marcy when she's took't, poor child! 'twill be a blessed good job, for sure and sartain!"

After awhile she became quieter, and then would repeat in her sleep snatches of texts and hymns she had learnt from Tom.

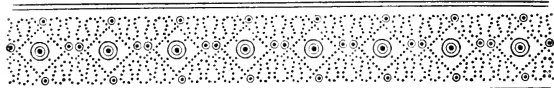
The young clergyman walked homewards; he could not help thinking of the interview. How very strange of that girl to seize on him, and insist on his answering her question. There could be only one motive for her doing

so—she knew of some mischief going on, and wished for a more credible witness than herself as to the fact of Jack's not being concerned in it. He could not fancy, as they were both so young, it could be anything of consequence; probably it was only poaching, or some trifling matter, still he did not feel comfortable; he should name it to his father; he would not give up the girl, but still, after the late riots, it ought not entirely to be disregarded. He supposed he should have recollected the boy was at home, but they were always going in and out so at the Martins, he never looked to see who was in the room. But he was quite sure now the boy was at home, there was no doubt on that point. If he should hear of any wrong doings, it would explain the girl's conduct at once. He looked at his watch by the light of a lamp, it was a quarter to eight—when he passed her as he went down, the clock struck seven. His thoughts reverted to the girl. Poor child! he must

go to-morrow, and see if he could not arrange something for her benefit ; it was sad she should have such a father, and no one else to care for, or to look after her.

How much ignorance and sin, and evil of all kinds, there was around, and so little done to alter or improve it. He would try and do something for this girl ; he remembered Maude had named her to him—he had been very neglectful. But then he recollected, there was good being done, though not, in this case, through him as the instrument. Yes, indeed, there were many even at home living as heathens, in all but the name ; there was no need to go abroad to look for them. But, then, was there not a missionary in Duck Lane as well as at Fairleigh ?





CHAPTER IV.

THE WIDOW.

THE poor have little time to brood over their griefs ; almost as soon as returning consciousness enables them in any way to undertake their accustomed duties, they will again be found at them ; the daily need of the daily bread allows no dreaming over sorrow. If the hands, or even the head, can work, the heart must bear the weight that has come upon it as best it may : and so it comes to pass that, in the homes of the working classes, death, even in its saddest form, is not allowed long to usurp altogether power over the minds of the bereaved.

Whether this is good or bad—whether it tends to quicker recovery, or to more abiding desolation—whether those who sit down wearily with their grief, nursing it, as it were, like a choice treasure, from which they cannot part ; or those who, driving it back down into the icy depths of their being, wrestle with it alone in the still hours of darkness, and stand up before the world little different to what they were previously, suffer the intensest agony, is for those psychologists to say who study the phases of the human mind. To the narrator of a plain tale, it only rests to tell that tale, and to relate the manner in which the sorrows or the joys that come on each connected with it, are borne by those on whom they have fallen.

Three short weeks had elapsed since the sailing and return of the *Lady Bertha*, and the lonely widow had already learned how utter was her loneliness, how deep her destitution ; she could not sit down with folded hands by her desolate hearth, the cry of hunger from

her children, even common-place as it may seem, the feeling of that hunger within herself obliged her to work.

It was the same evening as that when James Knightly met the Irish girl in Duck Lane; it had been rather damp earlier in the day, but towards evening a fresh breeze blew up, and dispersed the rain clouds, giving promise of a fine night. She put her two children to bed, and watched them till they fell asleep; then seeing them locked calmly and peacefully in each others' arms, she wrapped up the baby as warmly as she could, and taking it with her, locked the door carefully and went out, taking the road to SADBorough.

A relative there, who took in plain dress-making, had offered to give her work to take home to do, and this evening, for the first time since her husband's death, she crossed the threshold of the door, and went to ask for it.

The neighbours had all told her the walk would do her good—it seemed a very strange idea to her; she was so weak, she could scarcely get on at all. She held to the door as she left to support herself; the baby felt so heavy on her arm—had it been any other burden, she would undoubtedly have let it fall, but she held it all the closer, as she felt how little her strength was.

There was such a strange unreality about everything—as she passed Gain and Twine's, which was close in front of her cottage, only separated by a narrow alley, the back windows of the little house looking out into a lane, it appeared to her as quite a different place; she knew it all very well, but it seemed as if she had known it long ago in a dream, or as if she were in a dream now, that was bringing to her recollection places she had known in her waking days of long ago. The ages that seemed to have passed since she was there before—it was just three weeks; then

the short time ago that she traversed it on her return from church, the day when she was married, and came full of hope to take possession of the little cottage—that was five years since. Had she been in a dream all through, or was she in a dream now?—her bewildered mind could scarcely inform her how it was, but a cry from the infant went to the mother's heart, and told again the whole tale, and she knew that it was true. She wrapped it up more carefully still, and pressing back a starting cry, went on quicker than before.

The evening was dusk, drawing on towards night, but it was not quite dark, and she went on without stopping. There did not appear to be anyone on the road; but after a little while she heard voices and steps—she thought they were some people going down to the port; there was generally a good deal of passing. Just then a shower of small sparks fell on the road—it was rather a dark part, but a light

from a cottage window sufficed to show her that they were two boys who were passing, and that they were amusing themselves by striking lights as they went on. She hardly noticed them—would probably have forgotten that she had met anyone, had not after events brought the circumstance to her remembrance. A little further on another figure passed her—that of a girl; but she kept in the shadow of the hedge, and the woman took no particular notice of her.

She went on towards the town, going up Wolf's Road—Lady's Lane was a rather shorter cut, but it was both dark and muddy that evening, so she preferred the other way, though it was rather instinct than anything else that guided her steps that evening to SADBOROUGH.

But passing up Fivefinger Street, she was recalled to a recollection of passing events by being addressed by James Knightly, who had known her husband and herself; but the

vessel having sailed during his illness, he had not seen her since her loss, and recognising her by a light in a shop window, he stopped for a minute to speak to her, and to ask after herself and her children. He then went on, as has been said, to see poor Tom, and she continued her way to the further part of the town, where her friend lived.

She was received very kindly ; she had not meant to stay a minute—sorrow had brought its usual accompaniment of nervousness and fear, and she, who had often left her children without any feeling of apprehension, could not shake off the gloom that was upon her. But she was thoroughly worn out—she sat down exhausted ; the baby was taken from her, and her friend gave her something to eat and drink, of which she really stood in need ; and when she was sufficiently refreshed, the work had to be looked out and explained to her.

“ It’s well for you, Lisa, that they don’t

gore skirts now," said the dressmaker; "they's a great plague. Straight seams is much easier to run; and flounces be out too, so it's nothing but plain sailing, as one may say, and easy enough, too. Why, what was that there bell? I thought I heerd it," said she, interrupting herself in her explanation.

"I heerd nothing," said the widow; "but then I've been a-hearing a bell so long. I heerd it afore Bill sailed, and I begged him not to go; but he would"—and she sobbed as she spoke. "There!—I did think I heerd a stroke; I'd better be a-going."

"Don't 'ee be in a hurry; there's nothing, I don't believe. I'm always thinking there's something new since they riots; but things is quieted down nice."

"Is there much work now?" inquired the widow.

"Pretty fair," said the other. "I'm to have some of Miss Gain's morning dresses to make after a bit, so I reckons I can keep you in work

for some time on, if you ain't forgot the way."

"I used to be good at it—very," said the poor widow; "and I don't think as I've forgot. I declare there's the bell again!"

"Oh! 'tis your fancy, that's all; I hear nothing. But, as I was saying, I can give 'ee plenty of work, I've no doubt. I'd thought of taking on Sall Martin, but as you wants it, I'll give it to you. It be right to help one's own friends first, and girls be always plagues. What's all that passing?—I hopes there ain't going to be no more riots."

The dressmaker lived in a quiet street; but there was evidently something going on at a distance, and footsteps were heard passing down before the house, as though going to join the others.

She opened the window and looked out; there was nothing to be seen, and no person was passing of whom she could inquire. They had all passed, but steps and voices were heard still in the distance.

“There’s something going on,” said she. “Perhaps it’s the gentleman that’s going to stand for the town come. He was to stop at Mr. Gain’s. He was coming at the time of the riots, and then ’twas put off. You’d better stop a bit. I hope there won’t be no row.”

“I can’t stop, I’ve a-left the children. I hopes ’tis nothing down there.”

“Laws, Lisa, how nervous you be! How can it be anything down there? You’re out of the way, and safe enough—here, I’ll do up the work.”

The work was done up; she took up her baby, and, thanking her friend for her kindness, left. The other opened the door for her, and looked all round. It was very quiet now, rather a dark night, but there were a few stars shining.

“There, you’ll get on nice; whatever it was, it’s all gone by now, and it’s quiet enough down to the port.”

She went on through the street, it was getting rather late. What with one delay and another, she had been considerably more than two hours absent from home, and she walked on quickly in her eagerness to return. She began to think about her children, hoping that they were still asleep, that they had not awoken and found her absent.

The baby was lying back heavily on her arm, it was very comfortably asleep. She was herself revived by the food that had been given her, and the kindness that had been shewn her. She had her work in her hand, her thoughts were, in some measure, occupied respecting it—as to whether she was equal to undertaking it; and the walk home, for the first part, even although the thought of the desolation that now reigned in it would sometimes intrude, was not near so sad as had been the one into the town.

She had to pass through several streets before she came into Fivefinger Street. The

shops were mostly shut, and it was all very quiet, but when she came there some people were running about as though looking at something, but she did not notice them as she turned quickly into Wolf's Road. As she turned the corner she thought it was very light; she lifted up her head, there was an intense lurid glare before her, lighting up everything around; flashing flames of fire, mingled with black wreaths of smoke, were bursting up into the dark winter sky.

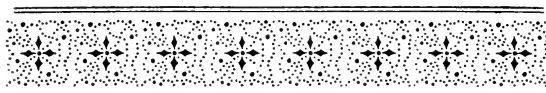
The old thoughts returned upon her mind with renewed strength.

Had these last few weeks been all one wild terrifying dream of her imagination, beginning with the terrible scene of the stranded ship, and ending with this unearthly glare? or was it, indeed, all real? Was her husband lying at the bottom of the sea?—and were her fatherless children even at that very moment death-doomed by the devouring flames?

The cry of agony that arose then from her

lips startled many of the passers-by ; they looked to see who had given utterance to it, but she was gone on, on down Wolf's Road, pressing her infant closer to her arm, walking as she had never walked before, out from the loneliness out into the crowd ; out from the darkness, out into the glare ; out from the chill of the night, out into the stifling heat of the burning fire.

And still it burnt, unheeding the efforts of the people, uncaring for the water that was pouring on from engines and from buckets ; unmindful of the distress of the owners, who were vainly endeavouring to rescue some portion of their property ; reckless of the innocent babes, over whose roof it was wreathing in clouds of smoke and flame ; indifferent to the agony of the widow, who rushed wildly into the midst of the throng—on, on it burnt, leaping from thatch to thatch, from roof to roof, as if the very demons of evil were glorying in their work !



CHAPTER V.

THE FIRE AT SADPORT.

“**F**IRE! fire!” again wildly, fearfully the sound echoed and thrilled through the streets of SADBOROUGH, caught up from one to another and sent on.

“Fire down at the port! Gain and Twine’s store a-fire!”

A few strokes were rung out from the church bell, but many were not needed, every one was alive to the danger now; and as the bell ceased, numbers were on their way to the scene.

A feeling of insecurity had come upon the

people of the town, caused by the events of the last few weeks, but, since the apprehension of the rioters, matters had seemed to be more settled. It was thought and hoped the turbulent spirits were quieted, and every day that passed without fresh disturbance was an assurance that peace was restored, and all cause for anxiety at an end.

Very startling, very terrifying, then, it was to hear this cry, it woke again all the old terror. Fire was a something that could not be guarded against, a danger from which none was secure.

The mischief was not over, the evil was not come to an end.

James Knightly was returning home after his conversation with the girl ; he had visited one or two houses after the Martins, but did not stay. He was still far from strong, perhaps he had been doing rather too much, and he felt somewhat tired as he entered the gate of Fairleigh. But just at that moment the

cry of fire caught his ear; some men went quickly past.

“Where is it?” he inquired.

“Down to the port, sir,” was the reply.

A fire at Sadport was likely to be a fearful thing amongst the stores and inflammable materials that were heaped up there in such quantities. But he did not feel that he could be of much use, and might not have gone, at least not immediately, had he not recollected the mysterious manner and question of the Irish girl; and he felt sure in a moment that this was the mischief which she was aware was going on.

Without thinking any more of his weakness, he at once retraced his steps, and, going the shortest way out of the town, was soon in the thick of the crowd of people who were hurrying on to see the fire. He came upon Mr. Twine, just emerging from his house in the High Street, and joined him.

They scarcely spoke, going on very quickly;

presently they had to stand aside for the engine, which came rattling on at a great pace; it was in good order now; then a horse came galloping up in the other direction. Mr. Twine spoke to the rider:

“Going to Woody Knoll,” was the reply without stopping.

“I have sent too,” said he to James; “and also to Chesterton for their engine; but it will all be down before any help can reach—wretches! rascals!” and Mr. Twine muttered and swore bitter curses between his clenched teeth, as he came in sight of the place.

It would have been a trying sight for any man to see his property so going to ruin. The flames had not gained the ascendancy they did afterwards, when more than an hour later the poor woman came down the same road; but there was enough even then to show that the fire had gained too strong a hold to be easily dislodged.

The engines were both down there, and

were already pouring on water, but the high wind swept the flames onward; and the oil casks and other inflammable and combustible things were not easily put out. The flames seemed as it were to laugh at the puny efforts that were raised against them. The whole of Gain and Twine's store was very soon one blazing mass, and there were many more stores belonging to other firms in the town blazing too. One caught from the other, and then caught back again. There were several attempts made to save some of the property; men, at the risk of their lives, entered the place—rolling out the casks, and calling for assistance to those who were less willing than themselves to undertake such dangerous work.

Presently Mr. Gain arrived; he at first hardly recognised his partner in a man with his coat off and a blackened face, who came up and spoke to him. But it was not long ere he was at work too. Vain—vain work!

—the fire had been easily ignited, but it was not to be so easily extinguished !

The oil casks were, many of them, rolled over the wharf. It was thought the water would put out the fire, but in many cases it failed to do so ; and they floated about like little burning islands among the shipping, until the sailors would allow no more to be thrown over ; and then they blazed up higher than ever on the land.

The large wooden doors of the store were burnt down, you could see completely into the interior ; it was one seething mass of fire, and after a while, as the blazing flame burnt down, the things could be observed, many of them standing upright, just in their old position, their forms unchanged, only that they were now clear red glowing cinders ; the heaps of rope were seen, every coil perfect, the nets in network of burning light ; it was all aglow, all like a burning furnace of different materials, perfect in form, but as if heated at the forge of

Vulcan ; even the hard-working men stopped for a moment to look at it, then suddenly there was a cry to take heed to stand aside ; they all fell back, and with a loud crash the roof fell in down flat upon the burning mass—there was a moment's darkness, as if the fire had been put out, and then the flames blazed up afresh into the heated air, looking for some fresh prey.

A wild cry mingled with the crash of the falling timbers—a rushing, dishevelled woman's form came almost flying amid the crowd, past the place, unheeding the flames, reckless of the danger, through the little alley at the back of the store ; the one or two who saw her then remembered for the first time that the cottage of the sailor who had been drowned, was situated in that direction. A few men followed her down the heated passage ; the wall of the store on that side was still standing, though in a most perilous condition, but the flames crossing to the roof of

the cottage, almost met over their heads. The mother took the key from her pocket; she never spoke a word. She gave the infant to a man who stood by, almost throwing it into his arms; she tried to turn the key, she could not do it, in her terror she turned it wrong—it would not move.

James Knightly, who had hitherto been doing very little, had been one of the first who had seen her; he wondered he had forgotten the cottage, and was the first to follow her down the alley; he took the key from her, with a strong effort turned it in the lock—a man who was there held her firmly back, as she attempted to follow, and in scarcely a moment James was in the house, and going up over the stairs. Those in the alley retreated, dragging the poor woman with them; the wall was tottering to its foundation, and they were environed by the flames, but a voice, it was that of the captain of the *Lady Bertha*, called after James—

“The other window, Mr. Knightly!—the other side of the house! Ladders to the other windows, my lads—put ’em up, for God’s sake!” and they were raised, and the opposite window that looked into the lane was immediately opened from the outside.

The cottage was not yet on fire inside, the thatch having caught at the top, but the heat was intense, and as James Knightly went up the stairs he felt it stifling; he easily found the room where the children lay, still fast asleep; the noise until now had not been very near them—the little fair faces were turned upwards, looking so calm and quiet, the stillness of the whole was such a strange contrast to the bustle and confusion outside. He caught up one—he could not do more—his arm was still very weak; he had scarcely as yet used it, and the wrench of opening the door had put him to extreme pain; he was scarcely aware of it at first in his excitement, but now his overtaxed strength suddenly gave

way, his head reeled, he thought the house was falling—the heat and the roar mingled together—he felt as if he was going down, down with the house; he tried to lift the child on to the window-sill, he did not know whether he had succeeded in doing so—it reeled round more than ever, everything was falling around him, and he falling helplessly with it all, and then he remembered nothing more.

His face had been seen at the window, looking very haggard and pale. Had the men not seen him go up, he would hardly have been recognised; but he had the child in his arms, and a breathless stillness reigned amid the crowd, broken only by the cry of the mother, who stretched out her arms and tried to break away from the men who held her as her child's face was seen. He had all but lifted the little girl on to the window sill; the ladder was being fixed, when he was seen to sway back; he made another attempt, weaker

than the previous one, but did not succeed, and then tottered and fell with the child in his arms.

A scream of horror was heard from all around ; it was thought the floor had fallen in, and that they were lost ; but Job Martin, who had been working hard all through, was up the ladder the same minute, and the trembling child was handed down and given to its mother.

The captain of the *Lady Bertha* had another ladder raised, and then with difficulty, and not without much danger to all concerned, the insensible form of the Curate of Sadbroke was brought through the window of the burning cottage, for the flames, entering in at the open window from the roof, were catching the woodwork and the curtains, as Job Martin once again went up.

The screams of the terrified little one who had been left alone, were heard even above the roar of the voices of the crowd ; it had

got out of bed, and crawled to the window, where the figures were seen, and at the very moment Job caught the boy, the roof fell in, and the ladder was thrown by the shock down upon the ground. The children were unhurt—terribly frightened, and that was all; but Job Martin was sadly bruised and burnt, and James Knightly was carried home insensible, to lay many days hovering between life and death.

And this evening, in Duck Lane, Nanny was waiting anxiously for Job; and feeling so thankful that the children were all asleep, and knew nothing of what was going on, especially Jack, who would have been sure to have gone out had he known of the fire, and might perhaps have been hurt; and the boy was lying listening to every sound—hearing the engine pass by, hearing the cry of fire, then listening as it grew fainter and fainter, scarcely daring to breathe—wishing he could go to sleep, but feeling as if he should never

go to sleep again—thinking if he only had known nothing about it—wishing he had gone down there, then folks would not have thought anything about him—feeling he could not go, wondering whether he had not better try and go even now. There he lay, trembling, cowering, as he had never done in his life before ; he knew too much—what would he not give if he had known nothing at all? And then he heard footsteps coming near to their house—it was his father coming home ; but there were others coming with him—what could be the matter? The bold, brave boy was a miserable coward now—he heard his mother's voice inquiring, then his own name called, and he had to get up, and to come down stairs ; he dreaded to know what they could want him for, but he soon found now. He was to help his father upstairs, and then to go and fetch the doctor ; and as he saw his father's scarred face, and heard him groaning with the pain, he thought there was punish-

ment come indeed ; and Nanny felt it was a greater sorrow than she had ever had ; but they knew not there was a heavier trial awaiting them.

And at Fairleigh Mr. Knightly was reading the paper, and Mrs. Knightly was knitting as usual, rather wondering where James was—he was too weak to be out so long ; but they supposed he was at the Wilmots'. Presently the servant came in telling them of the fire. They were all greatly distressed ; like all the rest of the inhabitants of Sadbrough, they had hoped such things were over. But soon Mrs. Knightly became anxious about James, saying she feared he had gone down. Alice and Mr. Knightly thought it hardly likely ; but the latter soon left to make inquiries.

He had not gone far before he met a messenger on his way to Fairleigh ; they had all their previous anxiety to go through over again, only increased greatly, as a relapse is always so much worse than a first illness.

And then at the Grange they were spending the evening in their usual manner. The fire-bell had not been heard there any more than at Fairleigh ; and they were quite out of the way of persons passing on their way to the port.

Maude sat fancying she was at work, but doing in reality nothing, as she indulged in a day-dream of those happy, loving musings which come only once, and with such sweetness to young hearts : all the sadness of the last few weeks gone—no more misunderstandings, no more fear or doubt of being loved, nothing but brightness in her future ; no more sorrow, no more sadness ! She was expecting James to come in ; he did almost every evening now, and what happy evenings they were ! She wondered she did not hear his knock as usual.

“ Your work does not get on very quickly, Maude, my love,” said her mother.

“ Oh, mamma ! I thought I was doing

a great deal," replied she. And Annie laughed.

As the hours wore on she thought he had probably had some unexpected engagement, and was too tired and late to come in ; she should see him in the morning, and hear the reason ; but a knock came at last—it came—but it was not his !





CHAPTER VI.

THE FATE OF THE “LADY BERTHA.”

THERE were sad hearts and anxious watching eyes both at Fairleigh and in Duck Lane for that night's work ; but the work was not over yet—the destruction was not complete. At the wild scene of desolation the flames leapt higher and higher ; store after store caught, building after building ; the engine from Chesterton arrived and lent its aid ; they could have found work for a dozen engines now if they had had them. The men worked as they had never worked in their lives before. Several vessels put off further, and anchored at some little distance, to be

out of the way of danger. From the timber yards logs of wood and planks were dragged out and carried off, but oftentimes only to spread the danger, for they caught when it was least expected.

Mr. Gain and Mr. Twine, and many other gentlemen, were working as hard as any of the men, when, at the moment of the extremest confusion, to add to the terror and distress, from the *Lady Bertha* was heard the one wild cry—"fire!" It was caught up and echoed on till it caught the ears of the owners, as they were exerting themselves at some distance from the wharf. "Fire!—fire aboard the *Lady Bertha*!" It was true—too true!—she had braved the terrors of the deep, come back little injured after her perilous voyage, to find her doom near to her own home—her destruction close to the very spot from whence she was launched!

Most of her crew had been on shore assisting, but when, earlier in the evening, the oil

casks were thrown over, the captain returned to see that his vessel was safe, everything appeared to be so. The wind was blowing the other way, he thought there was no danger for the ship, and all help that could be procured was needed on shore. So, after waiting sometime, he returned, leaving the boy in charge; but the boy looked every way but just the one where the danger was, and so it happened that a rope hanging over caught fire, and rope after rope caught, and the fire had entered her hold, where part of her cargo was again stored, and had taken firm possession there, before those on land knew that there was any real danger.

“The *Lady Bertha* a-fire!” “Fire aboard the *Lady Bertha*!” The cry was passed from mouth to mouth; there seemed no end to the trouble now—no certainty how far it might not reach.

The crews of the different vessels in the harbour went back to them, many put quite

out to sea, seeking safety from such dangerous proximity: those who had been among the most useful and active of the assistants on land were doing their own work now.

The captain and most of the crew went on board the moment the alarm was given; the owners came to assist, and to encourage the men to work with handsome promises of reward; but it was too late—the flames leapt from side to side, catching cordage, timbers, sails, everything about the ship. Her masts caught, every spar and rope shewed clear by its own light against the dark night sky; the rope hawser by which she was moored burnt through; the tide was at its height, but as it turned the wind changed; and then—all a-flame from stem to stern, on fire at every part, and abandoned by her crew, as it was now evidently hopeless to attempt to save her, the *Lady Bertha* once again floated out of Sadport—a blazing mass, rising and falling with the swelling and falling of the waters.

The other ships had work enough to keep out of her way ; the many little boats that were floating about were drawn in as quickly as possible ; and still she went on, going with the tide, and driven by the ever-increasing wind, that made the flames burn higher on the land, and rocked her to and fro upon the waters.

She bumped once or twice against the old wooden piers, but they were too soaked with wet to catch ; and she went on still further out to sea, but floating a little to the eastward with the wind. The light was tremendous on shore, but out at sea it was all dark, excepting where the vessel was seen—one mass of glowing light, burning up in jets like lamps from every point of her rigging. Then suddenly there was a crash, the mainmast fell, the ropes were tinder, and went too, the other masts fell, a jet of flame burst up into the black winter sky ; but the wild beauty of the sight—if it might be called so—was all gone

—she was nothing now but a burning hulk ! She burnt nearly to the water's edge, and then in a moment heeled over and sank !

Many were looking on—many more than on that bright morning when she sailed ! She would never sail again—the ship from which so much had been expected ! It was a sad sight ; there had been quite a pause in the work going on on shore for a few minutes, but all turned to it again now.

“ Her's laying right straight afore the mouth of the river ; the lady herself was drowned in it, they say,” observed the sailor, who had before said he would never sail in the vessel. “ It's a judgment for having gived her such a name ; her was never like to come to no good—I never thought as her would myself.”

“ It's just nigh to the very place where the earl, or whatever he might be, droved in his ship when he comed to break down the convent, and her'd got the same name ; things

does come round wonderful sure!" was the reply from another.

"And the earl's ship was lost out to say, not far off; 'twas a-dooming her to give her that there name at the onset," chimed in a third. "Her was like to have been lost in the gale, but her wasn't, and this was what her comed back for! Well! only to think of it!"

"'Twas a waste of good money to build her if them meant to call her that, not to speak o' men's lives, and a tempting of Providence, too."

Such was the talk on the wharf, the sailors had disapproved of her name all along, and this catastrophe made them believe more than ever in the truth of their superstitious views.

There are handsome building-yards now at Sadport; they have built many good ships since that day, but no one has ever named another the *Lady Bertha*. The flames, or, at least, the light they caused, had been seen

many miles inland ; at Sadbroke the fire was plainly visible. A neighbour went in to tell Mrs. Brown, and to ask her to come out and look, but she declined, saying she was too busy.

“ I’s a-got this ’ere net to get done,” she said, “ and if it’s they things as are burnt, ’twill be wanted all the more ; I shall get him finished to-morrow, and go in wi’ him myself.”

“ I suppose Jem’s down looking at it wi’ the rest ?—all the young chaps is,” said her friend.

“ No, not he, Jem’s left ; he went this morn up the country to look arter work. I hopes as he’ll get some, he ain’t no good at home ; but I reckons he won’t stop long, he’ll be back agin, and I’ll have to work for him—I can’t go out a-looking for lights !” and she jerked her needle in and out quicker than ever.

The poor woman, whose children had been

rescued, went back with them to Sadborough, to her friend's house, who took them in very kindly. The little ones were put to bed, and after awhile, tired and frightened, sobbed themselves to sleep; but she was too excited for that, she could not leave them for a moment now.

Mr. Saxon had come down while the ship was yet burning; he remained some time, and, as he was about to leave, recognized Mr. Gain, who was also just going to return home.

"It's a grievous sight!" he said; "one I trust we shall none of us ever see again."

"It is one we ought never to have seen at all," was the reply; "but if I spend my last penny on it, I will find out who has done this!"

Mr. Twine came up; he said the same as his partner, only more vehemently. They were determined, at any rate, to find out the perpetrator of the mischief.

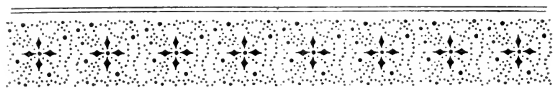
The rector, even now, was slow to believe in evil intentions; but how else could this

have happened? The owners were in no quiet temper, it was hardly to be expected that they would be, or that angry men would stay to pick and cull the language in which they phrased their feelings and intentions.

“ I hope you are insured ?” he inquired.

“ Yes, fairly,” replied Mr. Gain ; “ but the loss is a heavy one, notwithstanding ; we shall have nothing ready now for the spring trade.”

The night wore on ; towards morning the Chesterton engine returned ; those belonging to Sadborough soon followed. The crowd had dropped off by degrees ; there was nothing further to see—the sinking of the *Lady Bertha* had been the last event of any consequence. The sun of another morning rose, but there was nothing now left but a few heaps of dying out embers ; the great fire at Sadport was over—it had been only the work of a few hours, but the destruction was well-nigh complete.



CHAPTER VII.

THE FLIGHT FOR LIFE.

THE morning after the fire, a skulking, miserable figure of a boy was walking along a field about ten miles from Sadborough. Torn and dirty, wretched and forlorn-looking, an object that might have called forth pity from any passer-by. But he seemed to wish to avoid passers-by; to be endeavouring as much as possible to escape from anything like observation. He looked very pinched and hungry, very tired and cold, as was indeed the case, for he had walked the whole night; and now, as the morning sun rose, he became aware how miserable and how unlike others

he was looking, and the fear came strong upon him that his appearance might bring him into notice.

But he could not go on much longer without food ; he thought, as he had come such a distance, he might safely venture to procure some ; so, as he entered the next village, he went into a small public-house. The woman at first seemed doubtful as to whether he could pay for the refreshment for which he asked ; but he pulled out a shilling, saying, he was going in search of work, and had walked till he was most tired out. She saw he looked so, and gave him a good breakfast, and began to talk a little to him.

After breakfast he was so weary he fell asleep on the settle over the warm fire ; he could not keep up any longer. The woman would not have him disturbed—his piteous look had awakened her compassion ; she thought he had probably run away from his parents. A son of her own had left her

when a boy, and gone to sea; it was many weary years before she heard anything of him, and when at length she saw him again, and he recounted the history of his travels, and spoke of kindness that had been shown him, she thought she would never turn away any who might be in like case; and now, as she saw this boy, the image of her own son came before her.

“Poor fellow!” said she to herself; “he’ve been in mischief o’ some sort, no doubt; but ’t isn’t I as can set it to rights, and ’t isn’t the bit and the drop he’ve had here as will do him any harm, nor me nother—I owes it to they as helped my Bill!”

When he awoke, the little public-house kitchen was full; there was a great deal of talking. Some person had come in who had apparently an interesting piece of news to relate. For a minute or two the boy could hardly collect his thoughts; he was so comfortable, that waking as he did out of heavy

sleep, he hardly at first took in what was said.

“An awful fire to Sadport last night,” were the first words that distinctly caught his ear; “the place well-nigh a-burned down; and a fine new ship a-burned too. They as seed it, says as ’twere a sight worth going a long way arter to see her go out to say as her did all a-fire, till her sunk down. ’Twill be a terrible loss to they as the things belonged to!”

“Lor a marcy!” exclaimed the hostess; “only to think—how did it all happen?”

“It didn’t do itself, for sartain,” was the reply; “and no one don’t think as this ’ere fire took place promiscuous-like. There’ve been wild work a-going on in they parts, and this is what’s a-comed o’ it; but whosomever have a-had ought to do wi’ this, had a-best keep hissself to a long distance, for if he’s a-cotched, he’ll swing for it, for sure; and if I won’t be at the hanging, be it when it

may, never trust me agen for nought !” and as he said this, he drained his cup of beer, and put it down heavily on the table.

A slight murmur of applause was heard ; the auditors intended to stand by the law—they were quiet people. Besides, as they had had no part in all the entertainment that had been going on in Sadborough, it was only natural they should not approve of such doings.

“ They’s a bad lot down that way,” was said in reply ; “ I’d like to help ’em to find out the mische-vious set who’ve a-been at it. I always marks folks as I don’t like their looks. I shall take a walk over, and see about a bit.”

“ There ain’t nothing now a-left to see,” said the one who had told the news ; “ nothing but ashes, and such like. Pretty loss o’ money down there !” and so the talk went on.

The boy got up, yawning, and stretching himself, as if he were only just awake. He

offered his money in payment, and the woman took it ; but she followed him round to the other side of the settle, and quietly returned it to him, making a sign to him to say nothing. She looked at him inquiringly, but she could hardly fancy he could have had anything to do with the fire that had been talked about. It was only a foolish thought of hers that came at the moment—he was far too young for such work as that ; it must have been done by older and worse than he, for all his bad looks. No, her first idea was the right one—he had run away from home ; she hoped he'd get work, and turn out steady some day, like her Bill. Youngsters was a great trouble sometimes—their friends didn't know oft what to do wi' 'em.

“That's a queer-looking young chap, missus,” said one of the men on her return ; “where did him turn up from ?”

“I knows nought about him. I thinks the poor lad have runned away from home.”

“Looks as if he’d better run back agen ; but I s’pose he’s on the tramp—them chaps that runs away have got a bit o’ speerit in ’em, and they won’t go back to once.”

None of the men evidently connected him in any way with the mischief at Sadport ; yet the woman could not shake off the idea—it clung to her, making her feel quite uncomfortable. The boy went on ; his breakfast and the warmth of the fire had revived him and done him good ; his spirits were lighter—perhaps he might get work, and make a start in life ; he should go on, however, some distance further before he asked for it. And he kept still more out into the country ; he did not go in anywhere again ; he did not like to hear about the fire, and he felt more comfortable when he did not see anyone looking at him.

As the evening fell, he again became nervous and frightened ; starting at shadows that fell across his path. The woman at the public-

house had given him a piece of bread and cheese before leaving ; he ate it for his supper, and found an empty barn, into which he contrived to creep, and where he spent the night. He awoke stiff and cold, hardly able to move ; it was with difficulty that he rose, and it was some time before his stiffened limbs were equal to the task of going on ; but he did better as he tried, and he walked tolerably when he exerted himself. He was very hungry as he came to a small village ; he walked through some part of it, not liking to go in anywhere, but he could not leave and go again out into the lonely country roads without getting something.

He came to a part where the road had been raised, the cottages lying down below it, with a white paling in front, and steps down to the doors. One of these cottages was a baker's ; it looked very tempting, with the loaves and rolls in the window. He went down the steps, the little shop-bell rang as he opened the door ;

he started back, but then went in and bought some rolls. A man, whom he had not seen, followed him. He had a bundle of papers in his hand.

“Here, missus,” said he to the woman in the shop; “put this here in the window; here’s money for somebody as may have the luck to get it!”

It was a bill printed in large letters; at the top was, “ONE HUNDRED POUNDS REWARD!” She read it out—“For any person who will give information respecting the party or parties who set fire to the store at Sadport on the evening of the 20th of February.”

“Do you come from that ’ere part?” inquired she of the boy.

“Not I,” was the reply; “I comes from the other way! I was a-thinking of going there—I’m looking out for work, and maybe I shall go to say!”

“Well, now’s your time to get some money, you looks as if you wanted it terrible bad; a

hundred pounds would set anybody up for life! I wish as I knowed who'd a-been doing of it!"

He went out with his rolls, but his appetite was nearly gone. He walked on quicker than before; a horse came trotting past with a groom on him, probably taking him out for exercise, for presently he turned and came back. The boy trembled fearfully, he thought the man was looking for him, but he passed. As soon afterwards as he dared, he turned out of the high road, and struck off across the fields.

Before he did so, he saw one of the bills posted up against the wall of an old barn. He went on; the evening came again; how long had the day been?—could it be possible it had only been one day?—that it was that same morning he had bought the rolls?—only two days since he had been walking!

As the darkness fell, such fear and terror fell on him as he had never felt before. He

saw the words—"One hundred pounds reward" written, as it were, before him whichever way he turned. He walked backwards and forwards, he could see it everywhere still; then it seemed as if he saw the money all in golden guineas, with the faces on them looking at him as if everyone of them had eyes—wild gazing eyes, from which he could never escape, which would pierce his hiding-place, be it where it might. He groaned aloud; he heard a sound as though in answer; he screamed almost unconsciously, but no reply came; it had only been a cow in the field that he had startled.

The sound of his own voice brought him back, in some measure, to recollection. He finished eating his rolls, he crawled under a hayrick, sheltering himself as best he could, but it was bitterly cold; he would have died thankfully then, had he dared to die, but a verse taught him at school came back to his mind :

“Thou God seest me.”

He could not die, it would be worse to die than it was to live; but what a life had his become! How was it to end? What was he to do on the morrow? Oh! if he was only at home now in that home that he used to despise—if he had only done this—if he had only not done that—if he had not gone out that time—if he could only recall one act. Too late! too late! the answer seemed as if it were spoken audibly to him. He had been led into mischief, it had not been his fault; he would have been quiet had he been left alone—so he thought next; but it did not prevent the fact that he had been led, that the evil was done; that it could never be undone, and he moaned and sobbed, and the sound seemed, as it were, echoed by the moaning and sobbing of the night wind.

After a while he fell asleep; but the faces that he had seen even waking came close up to him, mocking and laughing. He thought

he heard voices speaking, rejoicing over his misery; he could not sleep, it was too dreadful; and yet he continued doing so from sheer exhaustion; but there was no rest, no refreshment in such sleep as that!

He had had a fever once, years before, when he was a child; he remembered something of it, he saw faces then, but not like these, not so dreadful, and this was not fever—this fear was the shadow of a dread reality—an awful future that was standing before him; there were eyes looking for him, there were voices calling after him; eyes and voices quickened to unusual discernment by that large reward; there could be no escape, it was over, all over for him! He could bear his thoughts no longer; he got up, the dawn broke, he walked on, he did not much care what happened to him, nothing could be worse than the present, he was pretty nigh reckless as to any future.

He came after a time to an open common,

somewhere in the middle of it four roads met ; at this spot there was a public-house ; he did not see any village near, though there was one probably hidden down under the hill. It was a wild, desolate, wretched-looking place ; he looked in at the window, a slatternly girl was lighting the fire ; the door was not yet opened. Presently she unlocked the door and came out to milk a half-starved cow that browsed on the poor short grass ; he went off to a little distance and watched her, but when she re-entered the house, gained courage to follow her in, and ask if he could have some breakfast. He started and looked round terrified as he spoke ; he thought it was some other person speaking ; he did not know the sound of his own voice, it was so harsh and altered. The girl thought he looked and seemed strange, but they were used to strange people there ; she said,

“ Yes.”

She was setting their own ; she began to clean the table, wet and soiled from the cups

of the last night. She took off a paper and gave it to him, saying it was something for him to read; it was the same he had seen before; his head swam so now he could not read a word, but he knew it well; the letters were imprinted in upon his brain!





CHAPTER VIII.

THE INN ON THE COMMON.

“**P**RETTY works have a-been going on, Mrs. Brown,” said Mr. Quaver to the widow the evening after the fire—“pretty works indeed! I hopes airnestly as none as you cares for have had no part in none of it, specially that Jem haven’t been in no mischief.”

“He’ve a-had nought to do wi’ none of it, you rest aisy as to that,” replied the widow, jerking her needle in and out as usual; “he’s a-been gone away since yesterday morn, a-looking arter work; he’s been a bad, troublesome boy to I, but then ’tis hard on a lone widder to have none but a lad; her can’t

a-look arter he, and I'm main glad he's off."

"And good need to be, ma'am, for they's not a-going to take things quiet now, as I hear; here be the reward for the discovery of the offender."—And he took the bill from his pocket and read it out to her.—"There's many will be a-looking out arter such a sum as this, not to speak of the government reward, which they spects will double it. 'Twould be like a Providence, as one may say, for a poor man to have such a sum as that a-sent him."

Mrs. Brown dropped her work; she fully believed her boy had left before the fire took place; she had not the least idea that it could affect him in any way, but she must have been strangely affected to make her do such a thing as that.

"Whosomever gets that money, it's the price of blood, Mr. Quaver," said she; "and whoever have a-done it, and whoever a-gets

it—and I knows nothing of neither—my curse light on 'em, and rest on 'em, and may 'em find no peace for it out o' their grave, or in their grave, where they'd better ha' been laid afore they'd a-touched it, or comed nigh to it !”

She resumed her work with increased energy, pulling up a knot so tight, it seemed as though she would have woven in the curse to the net. The little tailor was awed for the moment, but he could not be silent.

“Gold be the accursed thing, for sartain, Mrs. Brown,” said he, “and have been a sore tempting of the evil one, as we well knows, long afore you and I was born ; and 'tis hard to think how oft it falls into the hands of they as shouldn't have it, as, no doubts, this will. I wonders as they as should know better, a-gives in to offer such a thing, but they's poor dark souls, all on 'em ; it's the church teaching, I'm a-thinking, as makes such things ; the rich a-tempts the poor, they falls into the

snare, and they'll both, if they don't a-take heed to their ways, go down together into the pit !”

The grapes were sour for Mr. Quaver ; there was little chance of his getting the reward, but had any knowledge respecting the matter come in his way, the words of the widow would have come between him and the money. He was interrupted in his speech by the sound of a hand lifting the latch of the cottage door, and a man's face peered in, and looked carefully round ; seeing only Mrs. Brown and Mr. Quaver, he came in. It was a constable from Sadborough.

“ Your son at home, ma'am ?” he inquired.

She looked up, and answered :

“ He've a-been gone these two days. What do'ee want with him ? he's a-gone looking for work.”

“ He've a-done his work I reckons—so 'tis said, at least, to Sadborough,” replied the constable.

“Done what?” she asked, gazing at the man with the needle stretched out in her hand.

“Well, ma’am, ’tis no good a-denying of it; he was seen down to Sadport just afore the fire broke out, and there’s a warrant out for his apprehension.”

She flung the net over the table, on which it had been stretched, to the other side of the room, needle and all, and stood up before the men, a tall, fine woman still, gaunt and thin from hard work, and much care, but with a figure and look that startled them.

“What be you a-saying of?” she exclaimed. “His father was a honest man, and I be a honest woman—I as have worked night and day to keep him and myself, and you comes here to tell me this lie; go somewere else and tell it to others, and let me be, as you’ve let me be afore, when, mayhap, you might have helped me.”

The constable withdrew; he did not think

the boy was in the house, he had come over to see, and make what inquiries he could, but he did not expect to find him at Sadbroke.

Mr. Quaver left with him, and when they were gone, the widow gave a push to the table, sending it to the other end of the room, and then, woman-like, sitting down alone with her bitter anguish, rocked herself to and fro in an agony of tears.

Her brother came in soon after.

“I’m uncommon sorry, Martha,” said he, “for what I hear, but why ever was Jem such a fool? Why couldn’t he ha’ stopt at home quiet, and not gone and got you and himself into such trouble?”

“What for ever did you send that man here for?” she asked angrily; “’twas he as led him into mischief—’tis he, I be bound, as have done all this, and then lays it on the fatherless boy, as have none to care for him, and never had none to look arter him but just a lone widder like me.”

“Where’s the man gone?” asked her brother.

“How do I know? You knows; most like you’ve a-helped he off, and then set ’em on the boy, and I shouldn’t a-wonder if you takes the gold; you knows about it, and ’tis none but you would ever have a-named Jem.”

“I didn’t name Jem, Martha; I knowed nought about him but what you said, that he was off, till this ere moment; and I does wish he’d a-gone, or leastways we could prove as he had by a halibi, which’ll do just so well.”

She scarcely seemed to know that he was talking; she continued rocking herself, but she half lifted up her head and answered.

“You may go just so well; I don’t want you; you’ll do me no good; ’tisn’t to such as you I shall look in my trouble; if any helps me it’s the parson—he did try arter Jem, I will say it for him, he did.”

She rose up as if a thought had struck her,

and untied a bonnet and shawl from a nail behind the door.

“Where be you going?” asked her brother.

“Into Sadborough, to see parson Knightly, and tell him of what’s said, and ax him to help me if he will.”

“You may so well stop at home; he can’t if he would; he were hurt at the fire; they hardly knows yet whether he’ll live or die.”

She sat down again, her last hope of help gone. Much as she had abused the parson, she knew now in her hour of need who was the most likely person to help her if he could do so.

Her brother left, he could do nothing for her; and, indeed, now he was distressed himself—he had never meant to lead the boy into anything like this, but who can say of any wrong, “So far shalt thou go and no further?” The teaching had been learnt only too well, the seed sown had taken root, and now they

were gathering the fruit thereof—a plenteous crop, truly, for is it not grain that brings forth an hundredfold ?

Later in the evening she resumed her work, expending on it an amount of energy that would have surprised many, knowing the miserable circumstances of the case ; but she was used to work, and she felt it better than doing nothing. She worked the greatest part of the night, and then fell asleep in the chair ; she could not go to bed, and she kept the light burning, if the boy was wandering about he might see it and venture in. She could not bear the thought of his being out in the cold night. She tried to recollect everything connected with his leaving ; he had a few shillings she knew, money received for the poached game ; he might make his escape ; it was possible ; such things had been.

She thought over and over what she could do, her thoughts running round ever in a circle, and coming back to the one fact that

she could do nothing, that she was utterly helpless—a feeling that comes to a woman in distress in a way that no man can understand.

These thoughts came in the intervals between sleep, and mingled themselves with her sleep, forming strange wild dreams.

With the first grey dawn she awoke thoroughly, put out the candle, and drew up the blind of the little window, and then went to the cottage door to look out, partly hoping, and partly fearing to see the unhappy boy ; but he was not there to be seen, and she soon went in again, to spend another day in the same miserable way as the former.

The constable went back to Sadborough, to hold a consultation with the others ; they were tracking the boy's movements, as a sleuth hound will track blood—carefully from village to village, from hamlet to hamlet, were inquiries made respecting him.

The woman at the public-house, who had been so kind to the poor boy, the next day

saw two men enter. They inquired of her about him, but received no satisfactory answer. She'd enough to do serving folks as wanted serving ; if they wanted summut, let 'em ax for it, and if they didn't, let 'em go ; they was none on 'em anything to her, except as they paid."

At the corner of the village was the smith's shop, the forge aglow as usual, the smith and another man at work.

The men stepped in ; it seemed a good place at which to inquire. Just at the same time a groom rode up from an opposite direction bringing a horse to be shod.

"Have you seen a boy pass here on the tramp yesterday or to-day, maister?" was the inquiry addressed to the smith.

"Yes, plenty on 'em," said the man in reply, as he lifted up the horse's foot, "and plenty on 'em on the tramp. You must ax summut more plain like than that, if you wants a plain answer."

The bill offering the reward was posted up close by ; the smith, doubtless, knew what was wanted, and either could not give, or did not choose to give, the required information ; or perhaps he thought if there was a reward, there was no need for him to help others to it.

But the groom with the horse was willing to enter into a little conversation, and appeared to like to tell all he knew.

“ I passed a uncommon queer-looking chap of a boy yesterday morning,” said he, “ a few miles off from here. I was out with this ’ere ’oss and passed him once, and then turned and rode back, and he started most as if he’d been shot. I looked arter him, and he went on ; but when he thought I didn’t see he went over a gate, but I seed him for all his cunning—I was a-watching him.”

The two constables exchanged glances ; they felt sure this information was worth having, and inquired the way. The smith endea-

voured, with much seeming interest in their success, to send them wrong, but the groom set them right.

They went on. Once or twice they missed their track, and so lost some time, but they got into it again.

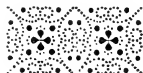
Unknowingly, the poor boy had doubled like a hunted hare; they were again within five miles of Sadborough, and almost feared they were going wrong.

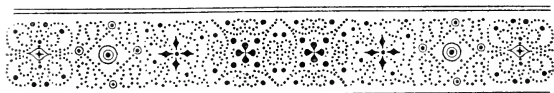
They stopped at a public-house on a common where four roads met—a weird, miserable place; a half-starved cow was cropping the stunted grass, a dragged girl was bringing in water, a woman's voice calling loudly to her to make haste; one or two disreputable, drinking-looking men were going in for a glass. One of the constables looked in through the window, then signed to the other to come up. The prey was hunted down—the reward won!

They went in softly; a hand was laid on

the worn-out miserable being, who had been wandering too long to keep up any longer.

Jem Brown was in custody, fettered and handcuffed. The flight was over, the retribution was at hand !





CHAPTER IX.

THE MARTINS IN TROUBLE.

SADPORT was a scene of devastation ; building after building lay in ruins ; a large quantity of property had been destroyed—there was no hope now of lading a vessel for the spring trade, and although the principal part both of houses and goods had been insured, this incapability of being ready at the usual time would of itself cause great loss to the owners. But there was no delay in endeavouring to repair the damage as quickly as possible—steps were taken for clearing the ruins, preparatory to commencing rebuilding, and for several days the place was thronged with people. There were idlers from Sad-

borough, and from the neighbouring places, many coming even from a great distance to view the ruins, and there were a great number busy working besides.

The agents of the different insurance offices were there, with a view to ascertain the amount of damage that would have to be made good ; the rubbish was being cleared away, the goods that were uninjured being separated from the rest, and the owners were overlooking all. At sea they were endeavouring to raise the wreck of the ill-fated *Lady Bertha* with all dispatch, as, having sunk at the entrance to the harbour, should a gale arise she might be the cause of yet further mischief. And over all the sun shone clear and bright, uncaring, as it seemed, for the sin and the sorrow, the misery and destruction, the ruin and the wretchedness, that were to be seen upon earth. It shone brightly down on the house at Fairleigh, though it was not allowed to enter the room where James Knightly lay. The doctors

agreed perfectly now—they were quite of one mind ; they had warned their patient what would be the consequence of not taking care of himself ; the nervous system had received a severe shock at the time of his accident, and then, instead of laying by, and taking care of himself, he had, as soon as he could get about at all, gone on just as usual, and, not content with doing beyond his strength, had undertaken what would have tried the powers of a strong man. Yes, they quite agreed ; they had some one else to lay the blame on now, and when that is the case people generally do—it was entirely their patient's own fault ; but they were very anxious notwithstanding, and shook their heads knowingly, and did not give much comfort to the family.

They could not tell for some time how far he was conscious, though he was certainly aware when Maude's hand was laid on his ; and would lay in this way quiet for hours. Poor Maude ! it was a sad change from the

happiness of the last few days—a happiness only just come, and now she dreaded to think of such a contingency, one that seemed about to be torn from her grasp.

And this same bright sun shone with faint beams through the lattice of the little cottage in Duck Lane, lighting up the room, which had no curtain to keep it out, where Job Martin lay moaning and tossing with restlessness and pain; and shining in, too, downstairs, as though it would flout the misery of the little kitchen, where poor Nanny went about her work with a sad heart, trying to still the noise and crying of the children, and where Tom sat, more weary and more worn every day, over the embers of the scarcely-alight fire.

“Why don’t’ee do summut, Jack?” said his mother, pettishly—“sitting about here bean’t no good to no one; you’s getting in everyone’s way, and you looks worse than all the rest—go out, do! and don’t’ee stop about filling the place up here!”

He got up, grumbling out that it was hard he might not stop at home when he was so minded, but he strolled out a little way. He had seen the paper with the offer of the reward for the person who had caused the fire at Sadport a day or two previously, but this afternoon another placard met his eye. It was the Government reward, together with the promise of a free pardon to any one but the actual perpetrator of the deed, to whoever would give such information as should lead to the commitment of the offender.

It was hope—it was more than hope, it was certainty—certainty of safety. He did not think so much of himself just then as of his father in his great suffering ; and of Tom, poor—poor Tom, if anything should happen to him it would break Tom's heart ; and then the money, and they almost starving at home ; what wealth, what comfort!—money to live like gentlefolks !

But no, that he could not do ! He could

not take the money, or could he take it and give it to them at home, and go out into the world free; free to work—free to go where he would; no shadow, no fear hanging over him, no danger near him! The danger all gone, his family provided for; and by him—him, the careless, thoughtless boy, who had never done anything for them before!

And how was this security to be gained?—how was this money to be got?—just by telling the truth, that was all; the plain, simple truth! And all the great people, the Government, whatever that might mean, and the gentlefolks of Sadborough, who must know what was right, had offered this money to any one who knew the truth, just for speaking it; and he did know it—he could speak it! It would save him—save him he scarcely knew from what, but from fear that seemed now all around him wherever he went; and save his father, and Tom, and all of them, perhaps, from death, certainly from bitter want!

Should he speak it? He started ; he had gone on thinking, hardly aware to what point his thoughts led him, but now it was as if he was awake in a moment. Never!—never!—they might take him up, they might do what they would to him, but he would never tell what he knew, never endanger another to exonerate himself! He had gone into wrong company, though he had not actually committed crime ; but now he would stand by the consequence of his own folly, be it what it might. And Tom, poor Tom ! He said the last word out loud, as he looked again at the paper, and at that moment he felt a light hand laid on his arm. He started, and glanced quickly round ; everything frightened him now. It was the Irish girl, no one else was near.

“Don’t do it, Jack,” said she ; “it won’t bring no blessing !”

He looked fiercely at her, as questioning her right to advise him ; but his glance fell

beneath the clear look of her dark blue eyes, which she bent full on him.

“I’m going in to see Tom,” she added ;
“you’d better come back with me !”

“They don’t want me there,” he said, moodily ; “I’m only just in everybody’s way ; ’twould be well if I was gone !”

But he turned round though, as it were, almost mechanically, and they entered the little house together.

Tom’s eyes brightened when he saw the girl, and she sat down by him, but did not speak ; it was not like her ; presently he saw tears falling from her eyes.

“What is it, Molly ?” asked he.

“Feyther’s gone and left me,” she said ;
“I do feel so lonesome, Tom ! If it wasn’t just for coming here, I should wish I was dead ; I does often now, but perhaps maybe it’s wrong !”

“Oh ! don’t wish that, Molly,” replied the boy, “we be all so glad to see you here ; and

now we're in such trouble, what should we do wi'out you ! I be so glad you're a-comed in !”

She threw a glance at Jack, who was sitting in a corner at the other side of the room.

“ I don't think I shall die just directly, Tom, leastways, I hopes not ; I reckons I've summut to do yet, though I hardly knows how to do it ; but maybe, when the time comes, if it do come, the way'll come too. You pray to God it may be so, Tom—he'll hear you when you prays !”

“ And so he'll hear you too, Molly—I know he will !” said Tom, earnestly.

“ Yes, I believes it, Tom ; you've been a comfort sure to me, often enough, since I've been here, and I thinks as the Lord means I should pay it you back again ; it's my prayer that I may, but the clouds hang dark enough round all o' we now !”

“ There's a bright light in the clouds, Molly,” replied he ; “ we'll look at that rather ; don't 'ee think 'twill be best ?”

She looked at him pityingly, and then again at Jack. The boy fidgeted—he could not bear her looking at him in that way, and yet he was not afraid of her; her eye was too clear and fearless for him to dread any deceit on her part, but he did not quite like to be pitied by a girl, as he saw plainly enough from her manner was the case; she must know more than the others to look at him like that, and what a fool he had been to put himself in her power, or into that of any people, be they who they might. But what could she know? Perhaps even more than he yet did himself. He felt as one who was tangled in a net of his own weaving, and every effort that he made to break through, only tied it the tighter around him.

“Law!” exclaimed Nanny, “if here bean’t Mr. Mills agin; how uncommon kind he be to come down here agin to-day!”

The doctor entered as she spoke.

“How is Job?” he inquired.

“He do suffer terrible much, thank’ee, sir!” said Nanny, dropping a curtsey. “Will you please step up-stairs?”

He followed her up the narrow, almost ladder-like, staircase. Job was lying with his head and arm bandaged, suffering a great deal, and bearing it about as badly as those who are unaccustomed to pain generally do. But he left off groaning when Mr. Mills came in. After the usual medical attention, the doctor said:

“I did not come altogether to see how you were to-day. Mr. Knightly asked me to see you for him, as he is too anxious to leave home just now more than he can help, but he wishes you to have everything you want from his house, and he has sent you this.”

And Mr. Mills placed a piece of gold in Job’s unhurt hand. It was a very unusual thing for his fingers to close on such a piece of money. He tried to say how much he was

obliged, and Nanny, who had seen it, overwhelmed Mr. Mills with her gratitude.

“Mr. Knightly considers he is indebted to you, Job,” said Mr. Mills; “and if, as I trust will be the case, his son gets better, it will not be long before he comes to tell you so himself; and he thinks it is only his duty to do what he can for you and your family during your illness. So mind, Nanny, send for some broth for Job, and give some to Tom. Send up now, at once,” he continued, as she said something about not liking to intrude.

“And how be Mr. James?” asked Job. “You thinks, Mr. Mills, as he’ll get better, don’t ’ee?”

Mr. Mills shook his head, not altogether negatively, but doubtfully. He did not choose, even to the Martins, to peril his professional reputation by speaking decisively. It was a very serious case; he ought not even to have walked as far as Sadport, so weak as he was;

but then he had youth and a good constitution on his side. A few days would decide ; he should come and tell Job as soon as there was any change ; he hoped—indeed, he had every reason to hope—it would be a favourable one, but it was a pity he tried his strength so much !

“ Why, there, sir, you see,” said Job, “ one didn’t exactly know what one were about down there ; perhaps I mightn’t have a-gone up myself, if I had a-known what would have a-come of it ; and Mr. Knightly didn’t think of hisself—twasn’t like as he would, you know !”

“ I know exactly your feelings, Job,” replied the doctor ; “ I couldn’t have helped doing it myself had I been there ; I know I should have been led away by the excitement, every man would ; we can’t stand by and see others in danger without assisting.”

“ No, sure, that us can’t,” said Job, and he put implicit faith in the doctor.

He was so good-natured and affable, he was a great favourite with most of the poor.

As they were talking, steps were heard downstairs; some men seemed coming in. Just as Mr. Mills emerged through the doorway of the narrow staircase into the kitchen, he saw two constables securing Jack. The boy was deadly pale, he could scarcely speak, but he murmured out,

“I hadn’t nothing to do wi’ it; you haven’t no right to touch me!”

Mr. Mills stepped forward to inquire.

“It’s all right, sir,” said one of the men touching his cap to him—“here be the warrant; he was seen wi’ Jem Brown down to Sadport just afore the fire; they’s both on ’em safe now.”

The boy reiterated his declaration of innocence—

“I didn’t a-do it—I never went further than the corner,” he said.

“Don’t you say nothing,” said the constable; “I tells you that as a friend; whatsomever you says may go against you—so say nothing, and that can’t be used wrong.”

The boy was taken away.

Job had heard the noise, and, getting up, partly dressed himself with difficulty, and came down, a haggard, miserable-looking figure. Nanny was stunned with the suddenness of the unexpected blow; she could not speak—she could not understand it.

“What is it he be took’t up for?” asked the father in a hoarse voice.

“For the fire!” replied Mr. Mills.

“The fire!” said Job, “he were at home all that evening; as sure as there’s a God above, he’s innocent o’ that; he’ve done it no more than I did,” continued the man bitterly; “they’ll say that next! I wish I’d a-stopt away and let it burn by itself!”

“On my life I believe he is,” said Mr. Mills, warmed into unusual energy by the sight of

the terrible distress around him. "I'll see Mr. Knightly about it directly, and hear all I can."

And he left the cottage.

Nanny flung her apron over her head, and rocked herself backwards and forwards in wild despair. Mary went up to her, lifted off the apron and kissed her.

"He've not a-done it, all we as knows him knows that, and I knows it for sure ; but you must keep up heart for his feyther and for poor Tom ; don't 'ee break down, they can't dowi'out 'ee."

The girl stayed all the evening, set the tea, and put everything straight as much as she could ; above all, sitting by Tom, and trying to comfort him ; but the boy's heart was well-nigh broken now. To see the strong brother, to whom he had looked up in his weakness, and who, whatever had been his faults, had always been tender to him, thus torn away from them all, was very terrible.

“He haven’t done it, Molly,” said he, hardly able to speak for sobbing.

“No, he haven’t, Tom,” she replied, slowly and decidedly; “but, as I said afore, you pray to the Lord for help, for He knows the truth, and you knows as He’ll hear you.”

Yes, Tom did know it, but in such great sorrow faith is oftentimes weak, and there was no Mr. Knightly near to speak words of comfort, nor even Miss Maude to read to him; the earthly stays on which he had often leant, perhaps too much, were failing now; he, like all others, must learn there is only One in whom trust can be put at all times, and in all distress. Tom knew this; he knew where to look, and Molly and he did seek the blessing, and in due time the blessing came; but the trial had to be gone through first, and the evening closed in darker over the little cottage in Duck Lane, than even over the anxious sorrowing family at Fairleigh.



CHAPTER X.

CORRESPONDENCE.

THE short month of February ran out, and March, with its bitter winds, lengthening days, and clear cold skies, came in its place. The fields were becoming every day more clothed with spring verdure—the daisies springing up among the grass, the violets and primroses blossoming in the hedges. Time, who never stands still, was going on his way with his hour-glass and scythe, turning the one continually over, giving longer days and renewed health to some, joy and sadness alternating in these ever-changing hours ; and with his scythe, as he passed on, cutting

down the ripe corn or the young blade ; yet neither the one nor the other till the time was come, and in all doing his delegated work.

The cold bleak days seemed long and weary both to the Knightlys and the Martins, though there was happily hope now for the family at Fairleigh, that James would ultimately recover. An extract from a letter from Alice to her lover, although it is in some way breaking confidence, will show in the easiest manner the state of affairs at this time in the family :

“ Dear James is rather better—he is quite himself again ; and the doctors think him in a fair way of recovery, though he is still most extremely weak. But oh ! William, you cannot think what an anxious time it has been ; and how Maude has lived through it, seems to me really inexplicable. I am sure I could not, had I been in her place ; and yet you see I have, for I do love James very, very dearly,

but of course it is different for her ; but then she is so quiet, she does not show things as I do, which is very foolish of me, indeed. But now we are quite hopeful, and almost happy again. And how is Hugh?—poor dear Hugh ! I have thought of him a great deal, whenever I had time to think. I hope he is not reading too hard. Pray tell him to write. I cannot write to him to-day, as I shall not have time, but then I know he will hear from you.

“ Oh ! William, how much we have wanted you here—only, of course, you could not come, but we feel sure you will come down at Easter. And now I want to tell you of a very sad thing about this fire : there have been two boys apprehended for doing it, one of them little more than fifteen, and the other a year or two older. One of them belonged to James’ school at Sadbroke, and the other is the son of the man who saved James’ life when the cottage was on fire, and who was

very much burnt. It is said there is no chance of their lives being spared if they are found guilty, as, after the riots and the many fires we have had, it is thought there must be an example. Papa has intended to write to you himself, but when he is anxious he is so apt to put off doing things from one day to another, that I almost doubt whether he has. So I will tell you for him how very desirous he is that everything possible should be done for the poor boys. I know papa's wish is, that you should undertake their defence, if you can leave town. Is it not a dreadful thing to think of, that their lives should be sacrificed, and perhaps they are not even guilty ; I do not believe they are, and never shall ; and the poor man who rescued James has been quite laid up ever since, and though we do all we can for them, it will be nothing if we do not try to save the boy. Pray do your best, and write to papa ; I know how glad he will be to hear from you, and have your opinion, even

although he may not have written himself.

“ We have not yet told James anything about this ; we know he will take it so dreadfully to heart, and he must not be troubled about anything as yet ; but he is sure to ask soon, and then we shall not be able to hide it from him.”

Alice's was a long letter, as long as in those days of dear postage people would sometimes write, crossed and recrossed. It would have wearied anyone but a lover to have read it all ; but it was very welcome to the one who received it ; and though it was read all through, and re-read, he found time to answer it immediately.

“ DEAREST ALICE,

“ Thank God that James is so far better ! I have been miserably anxious ; and as to Hugh, I do not think he would have remained in town another day had the report

been an unfavourable one ; he said something, scarcely audible, the first day we heard the tidings, about wishing he had not gone home at Christmas ; but as he did not repeat it, I could not ask, and I saw nothing the matter when he were down—indeed, he seemed to me particularly happy and joyous all the time, though I certainly do not think he is looking very well now, but, no doubt, that is caused by anxiety about his brother ; besides, he is reading very hard. He is certainly out of spirits ; you had better send him a line if you can to-morrow. But when I say this, remember, I am not self denying enough to wish you to write to him instead of to me, you must try and find time for both ; if, as I trust, James continues better, you will be able to do so.

“And now about the business of the fire. It is a miserable affair ; I have seen the whole account in the papers, and have heard it talked over by several persons competent to judge. As the law now stands, there is no chance, I believe,

that the unhappy boys' lives will be spared, if they are found guilty ; and from what I have seen of the accounts, I cannot think myself but what the evidence will be very strong against them. If the punishment were anything less than death, none would rejoice more than I that they should be punished ; but to take young lives, even for such a crime, is an awful matter ! It is not, however, for me to judge the laws, and, at present, a prisoner being allowed counsel, has been a great step in the right direction. I will certainly undertake the case ; I wish I could secure more experienced counsel, but, under all the circumstances, taking, as I do, a deep interest in it, perhaps it is as well I should take the case. I almost look on myself as a Sadborough man—at least, I am nearly connected with the place, and I know something of these Martins. Let me have any information you may gain. I shall write to your father by to-day's post, that I may put myself in immediate communication

with the solicitor for the defence ; he will tell me whether he has already engaged anyone to undertake the business. James must not be spoken to, on any account ; but if, as I trust earnestly, he gets better soon, he will, as you say, ask everything about the fire, and I should not wonder if he should possess some knowledge that may be of material help ; but do not let him be asked, as it would only throw him back, and there is time enough yet.

“ Best love to James, and to all at Fairleigh. You are never out of my mind ; I hope to be with you very shortly.”

Mr. Knightly, although he had delayed writing to Hamilton, had told the solicitor for the defence that he thought his future son-in-law would be on circuit, and would be willing to defend the prisoners ; and that gentleman having very high ideas of Hamilton’s talent and judgment, said immediately it could not be in better hands.

They were soon in communication with each other, sparing no pains nor efforts in the matter; but the depositions taken before the magistrates went very heavily against the prisoners, and they both thought that, unless some unexpected witness rose up at the trial to speak in their favour, the hope of their liberation was a very small one.

Job Martin, as soon as he could leave the house, went to the lawyer, looking very miserable, with his bandaged face and arm. He stated positively that his son was at home that evening; but when he was questioned as to the time of his coming in, he could give no satisfactory answer. They had no clock, and they didn't hear the church when the wind was that way—'twere just afore dark, or just arter, he couldn't tell which; but he noticed particular that he was in.

This was not worth much, and the lawyer shook his head. This seemed to rouse Job up, for he suddenly added—

“Mr. Knightly comed in just afore Jack, and he stopped some time, and Jack never went out agen. I can swear to that much anywhere ; and maybe parson Knightly may mind the time when he’s well enough to be axed concerning of it.”

The lawyer asked him one or two more questions, and finding that he kept to the same statement, carefully noted it down, and dismissing him, went as soon afterwards as he could to Fairleigh. There he saw Mr. Knightly, who said his son must not be spoken to at present ; but as he was progressing towards recovery, he hoped it would not be long before he could have an interview with him, and hear whether he had any recollection of the matter, and could give any evidence that might be useful. However, it happened that very afternoon that Mr. Saxon called to inquire after him, and was admitted to see him for the first time. After awhile, James said—

“I have such a very dim recollection of everything about the fire, and I can’t get anyone to tell me about it—they think it would do me harm; but it worries me more to know there is something kept from me. Was anyone much hurt or killed down there, Mr. Saxon?”

“Well, yes, you were pretty much hurt—or, at least, the worse for going,” said the rector, guardedly; “no one else was injured particularly.”

“They have told me the children were saved,” he said, continuing the topic.

“Yes, there were no lives lost, only a great deal of property destroyed,” said Mr. Saxon, hoping that would satisfy him. “We shall have you out again soon, and then you can ride down the colt, and look at it all.”

He thought this might turn the subject, but it did not.

“I am beginning to recollect all about it,” he said; “yes, I hope to be out again very

soon. But I believe that fire was done on purpose—I wonder whether they suspect any one?”

“It appears to me as if you did—your illness seems to have made you suspicious.”

But he was determined not to be put off now, and, after Mr. Saxon left, saw his father, and heard the whole. He was very much distressed at the account, and told him of the interview he had had with the Irish girl, and also of the time when Jack came in; had he not been laid up, and been able to give evidence before the magistrates, Jack Martin would not, he thought, have been committed for trial.

But Mr. Knightly doubted this; the question of time was so near, he thought himself it was quite a case for a jury, and he believed that would have been the general opinion; still there was no doubt James would be a valuable witness in the boy's favour at the trial; it was therefore of great importance

that he should recover his strength sufficiently to be present, and with that view he must now keep quiet, and not make himself anxious.

Mr. Knightly told the lawyer his son's evidence corroborated that of Job Martin, and he was very anxious to see James at once; but that, his father said, could not be—indeed, he was none the better for all the information that had been given him; and when the doctors came in the evening, they asked what their patient had been doing to make him so much more feverish than he had been for some days past. They seemed to think Maude must have had something to do with this excitement; but as they never suspected her at the time of his first accident, when perhaps his anxiety on that subject was the cause of his slow recovery, probably she had nothing to do now with his present agitation.

“I am sure they think I ought not to have seen him, Alice,” said Maude; “but I don't

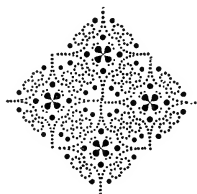
believe I did any harm—do you think I did?”

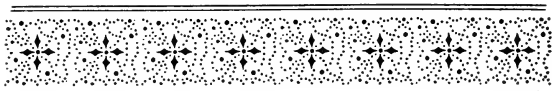
“My dear love,” replied that great authority in such matters, “if it had not been all right between you and him, I am quite sure—and mamma says the same—he would never have recovered at all.”

It was not Maude ; he was very sad about the unhappy boys, and, in his weak state, he was thrown back by anything that affected him. But he was better again in a day or two, and had an interview with the lawyer, who found he recollected the whole circumstance—time, place, and every thing else—quite as clearly as if he had never been ill at all.

But there was another witness wanted. James, and the boy’s father, could only say when he was at home ; it might be enough, but it was running very close ; there might have been time, though barely, for Jack to have set fire to the place, and still have been back when they said he was ; it did not seem

as if the time could have been sufficient, but it was a chance which way the jury might take it. Could they but find the Irish girl, she must know something concerning the affair; but she was not to be heard of—she seemed to have vanished out of sight.





CHAPTER XI.

ALONE IN THE WORLD.

A MISERABLE, wretched garret, with bare rafters, and white-washed walls—if those could be called so from which all the whiteness had long ago disappeared—a lattice window, high up in the wall, with no curtain or blind to shut out the rays of the sun, that streamed in brightly—a door that scarcely shut, and that admitted, through crevices and chinks, the cold, east, March wind, that blew in gusts through the open passage down-stairs. Such was the room in the little inn on the common, now tenanted by a sick girl.

She lay upon a low truckle bed, put back

in the corner, on which was a straw mattress. So scanty was the covering, that she had piled up all her own scant wardrobe to make up for the deficiency ; her hair was hanging loosely round her shoulders, and falling over the ragged counterpane ; her cheek was flushed with a high colour, the effect, in some measure, of pain and fever, the same tale of suffering being told by the unnaturally lustrous look of the large eyes ; she was trying to shade the light from them by holding up her hand, but she was too weak to do so for long together, and even when she did, the light would penetrate between the thin fingers.

It was Molly ; she had gone on one of her usual excursions with the skewers and laces, and, having fallen ill, was unable to return to Sadborough, quite knocking up when she got as far as this place, and now her recovery was retarded by her anxiety as to whether she should be able to carry out her intention of

going to Chesterton, to give what evidence she could respecting Jack.

“I shall never get well!” she moaned, “leastways, not in time; and if I goes, perhaps they won’t mind me, ’t isn’t one like me as they’d listen to; no one will ever believe that I’m telling the truth.”

She could hear, from her bed in the wretched room, almost all that passed in the house, and, through the cracks in the door, could readily follow all the conversation that went on of an evening in the kitchen. The fire at Sadport, and the expected fate of the prisoners, were often the subjects under discussion, so she was perfectly aware in what a dangerous position they stood. The papers were read and talked over, and eagerly did she listen for information, though, when she heard any, it was often the cause of a sleepless, restless night, and renewed illness.

“These ’ere sizes is bad ones all over the country, I thinks,” said one of the politicians

who collected there of an evening ; “ not but to say it makes the papers worth reading a bit. I, for one, don’t care to see ’em when there’s nothing stirring ; no murders, nor hangings, nor nothing. But they’s downright inter—est—ing now !”

“ They’ll be more so agen, I ’spects, next week,” said another ; “ when they comes on to Chesterton, there be a lot to be tried there sure ; first, there be all they rioters, who kicked the place to pieces shameful, and arterwards there be they boys, they’ll swing for it, and I hopes as they will !”

Molly shuddered, partly at the words, and partly at a cold blast that, just then, swept through the room.

“ Well, I don’t see as why you should wish for it,” said another ; “ that there fire have a gived plenty of work ; everybody most is busy now to Sadborough.”

“ More shame,” said the other ; “ pity the work don’t come this way ; they’ve got it as

didn't ought, arter their conduct ! But they'll swing for it—see if they don't !”

“ ’Spose they will,” said a quiet-looking man reflectively ; “ there'll be summut to see !”

She tried to go to sleep, but the noise downstairs prevented her, and the smell of the tobacco made her cough dreadfully. Presently the door opened, and the draggled, tattered girl, who lighted the fire and milked the cow, came in with a cup of tea and a piece of bread.

She was very glad of it, the sight even of the girl took away the feeling of loneliness that sometimes quite oppressed her. She was very thirsty, and drank the tea eagerly ; but she had very little appetite, though she tried to eat the bread, that she might get up her strength, as she said, to leave. Poor child ! it was not the sort of fare for her to get up her strength upon !

“ Missus says,” said the girl, roughly, “ as

how you must see and be off to-morrow ; her don't like having sick folks about, they gives trouble, and maybe it's something catching !”

“I don't think 'tis,” replied Molly ; “ 'tis the pain in my side ; I've a-had it before, only 'tis worse this time !”

“Well, you must tramp, her says ; and I thinks as you ought, too ; I works, and why-for shouldn't you ?”

She would have liked to have asked for another cup of tea, but was afraid to do so ; and when the girl left her, she cried herself to sleep. The morning looked fine, and she attempted to dress herself, but could not do so, for the pain in her side ; after one or two efforts, she was obliged to lay down again.

“Shall I ever get away from here ?” she thought ; “God knows, I don't ! I told Tom to pray for me, and he will, I know that ! I hopes to see Jack again ; but he don't care for me—there's nobody does !”

The girl brought her some breakfast, and,

later in the day, flung open the door, saying,

“Here be some one as wants to see you.”

It was her father.

“What be you doing here?” he inquired.

“I’m bad, feyther,” she said; “like as I was afore I comed to Sadborough, only I’s worse now!”

He looked at her; for a moment there was almost a look of sadness on his face, but it passed as quickly as it came.

“You be just like your mother, I reckons,” he said; “no good to no one, always being bad. I’d have tootk you away if you could have gone, but I ’spose as you can’t!”

She shook her head.

“Perhaps it’s won’t?” said he, roughly.

She did not reply—she was, in reality, too ill to move just then; but besides that, there was in her heart the earnest desire to make some effort for Jack; she could not have given up the idea of attempting it—it was a hope dearer to her than her life.

“If all places were like Sadborough, folks must starve,” said her father; “I’ve been to better since—but I’m not going to stop in England, it don’t suit me. I’ve a-comed here now a-purpose to look arter you. I heerd you was here, and now I might so well have stopped away, for any good you’ll be!”

“Oh! feyther!” she exclaimed, her mind full of the great anxiety, “what do’ee think about they boys in gaol?”

“Think about they!” replied he with an oath, “think that they’ve put their necks into a noose, and sarve ’em right too, the fools!” and he swore again.

“Jack didn’t do it,” said she quickly.

“What do you know about Jack?” he replied; “if you’ve a-been arter they and knows anything about it, you’d better hold your tongue. I don’t like they Martins, nor you being there as you be—I never trust you for nothing now.”

“You never did, and I don’t want it,” she replied quietly.

“I’ve done my best for you, and I’d have tookt you over seas now, if you’d go, though not to go on as you have of late—but you’re that obstinate, I’d rather be without you!”

“I can’t go—I’m not well enough,” she replied; “and I’d rather stop——”

“Then stop—I cant! I’m off,” and he swore at her again, but at the same time threw some money on the bed.

“Yon needn’t look at it as if it would burn you—’tis good money enough, and I’ve a-gived it to you.”

He said no more, but left—left her, as she felt, to die. She turned her head to the wall of the room, and wept bitterly. It was not that she was fond of him, or that she had ever deluded herself into the belief that he cared for her, but he was the only being in the world on whom she had any claim, and now that the

tie was severed, she felt her loneliness even more grievously than before.

It was not so much him she thought of, as of her mother. She remembered her death, in a room very much like that she was now herself lying in; it brought back the old memory, the horror with which she had then shrunk from death—and she wondered whether she should ever leave that room alive.

The mistress of the house brought her up some dinner—it was an attention she had never shown her before, and Molly surmised that her father had given the woman something, or else had said he had given her money to pay for what she had, for the woman told her to drink up the broth, it would do her good, and she should get her some doctors' stuff at night, as she didn't like having folks lying about in the house ill.

She kept to her word, and gave her something, and the girl really felt better for it the next day, and in the evening crawled down-

stairs, as she said, to get up her strength before leaving.

The kitchen was full—the paper was being read. The assizes at Chesterton were opened, but none of the cases had yet been tried. She feared she should be too late, but presently she heard the men who were talking say the rioters would be tried first, that would take a few days, and the trial about the fire would be the last.

This gave her some hope; she told the landlady she thought she should be well enough to leave the next day. She wanted to go to Sadborough, and she was afraid of staying longer, for fear of being ill again, the air up there was so cold.

“You can’t never walk,” said the woman.

“Maybe I shall get a lift, and if not, I can take my time—leave airly in the morning, and get to Sadborough afore night. Five miles ain’t nothing, only I can’t walk now!”

“The carrier do sometimes come round this

way when he's anything to leave, but 'tain't sartain; but to-morrow be his day—that would be a nice chance!"

When the next morning came, Molly was hardly able to walk at all; but she did not give up her determination of attempting to get on, at all risks.

After breakfast she gave the money her father had left her to the landlady, and waited for the change.

The woman looked at it.

"Feyther gived it me," she said.

"Oh! 'tis no matter to me how you comed by it; 'tis good money enough, and if I charge, I've a-tookt care of you—you can't say anything against that."

She did not wish to say anything, but took the trifle that was given her in change without finding fault. The woman seemed rather surprised, perhaps somewhat disappointed. She was accustomed to have her charges disputed, and would have liked a little discus-

sion on the matter; she could then have argued she was right, and would probably have argued herself into that belief, now she felt that she was wrong.

Molly left. The cold wind swept bitterly round the angle of the old house; but as she descended the hill that led from the common and got into the sheltered lanes, it was warmer; and, as the day went on, it was quite pleasant and quiet. But she could not walk any distance; she soon found how incapable she was; she sat down on the bank and rested, then walked a little further and rested again.

As she sat, feeling as if she could not do much more, she heard wheels approaching, and presently a carrier's cart came in sight.

When the driver saw her he stopped his horse and called out to her.

“I s'pose you be the maid as wants to go on to Sadborough? They said up there they didn't think you'd get on far.”

How thankful she felt! she should, then, really get on at last.

The man helped her up, and some people inside made her as comfortable as they could among the packages and barrels with which the cart was filled.

They went some distance round, for it was out of the usual road to come that way at all; but now that she felt she had left that miserable place, hope came back to her again in some measure.

It was so pleasant amid the green lanes, the air felt so fresh and so reviving. A woman in the cart gave her part of her own dinner.

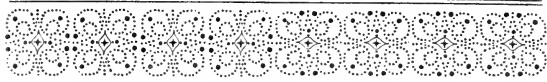
It had been long past noon when the cart overtook her, and it was late in the afternoon before they reached SADBROUGH, but she was going to see Tom, to see Mrs. Martin; she felt happier than she had thought it possible she ever could do again.

When they reached the town she offered

the carrier something for her ride, but he refused her money, saying she looked as if she wanted it herself.

She walked on with renewed strength towards Duck Lane, so thankful, so very thankful, that she was once again at Sadborough !





CHAPTER XII.

SALL MARTIN LENDS HER BONNET.

THERE were sad hearts at the Martins' cottage. In two days' time the trial of the unfortunate boys for the fire at Sadport would take place.

Just at dusk in the evening Sally came out of the house. She had been sweeping up a bit, as she said, and now came out to shake a mat. She looked about her a little while, not expecting to see any one, but it was very dismal indoors, and she lingered a few minutes with the mat in her hand.

Presently she saw a figure coming up the lane, which, as it drew nearer, proved to be that of the Irish girl.

“Why, Molly, wherever have’ee been all this time?” she inquired, “and we all so wretched,” and she burst into tears as she spoke, “and Tom real bad now, and Parson Knightly axing arter ’ee, and the lawyer, too—why, wherever have ’ee been?” and Sally wiped away her tears with the corner of her apron, and waited for an answer.

“I’ve been bad too, Sall,” said she in her usual hoarse voice, but now hoarser and lower than ever, and very sad in its tones, too; “I went away to a fair wi’ the laces, and was tookt bad, and I’m only just up agen. I’m tired now; I’d like to go in and sit down a bit.”

She followed Sally, who went in with the mat and the information.

“Here be Molly comed back agen, and looking terrible bad, too!”

“Come in, child,” said Nanny, kindly. “Laws! you do look bad, sure. Here, get a bit o’ bread, Sall, and a cup—there be tay in

the taypot; we keeps it warm, ready for Tom."

Job was sitting by the fire, in Tom's old place, who was now not there; the man had his elbow on his knee, and was shading his face with his hand. They were all miserably low. Perhaps some people would have said that Job and Nanny had such a large family, and so little to give them, the loss of one or two could be nothing to them; indeed, were they right-minded people, with a proper idea of the expense, that if Job were not able to work, and had not met with such a friend as Mr. Knightly, must come on the parish, they ought to have been really thankful at the prospect of the family becoming smaller.

But they were not what these sort of individuals would consider right-minded people, and the having one child, their eldest, in prison, about to be tried for his life, and another even at the same time lying on what would be ere long a bed of death, well-nigh broke the

hearts of both the father and mother of this large family, on whom the parish authorities looked with so much fear.

Molly was shaking with illness and cold; the warm tea, however, did her good, and the kind welcome she received cheered her; for, although Job did not speak or move from his place, he pulled back his chair a little to make room for her, and Nanny asked her a few questions, and seemed, notwithstanding her own deep trouble, to be able to sympathise with hers.

“Tom will be main glad to see ye, Molly,” said she; “he can’t stop up now—he never have got up since Jack left.”

And at the remembrance Nanny began to sob.

Presently Molly beckoned to Sall, and the two girls went upstairs together.

“Sall,” said Molly, “’tain’t no good to talk nor to say anything till one knows, but I’m going straight off to Chesterton. What I

knows would save Jack, if 'twere any other than I as knowed it ; but perhaps no one won't hearken to me when I get's there, but I'm going off to-morrow."

"Whatever do'ee know, Molly?" asked Sall; "more than all of us knows that he haven't a-done it, but 't isn't just our saying that as will do any good. Father's a-going ; he don't like it ; he says it's no good, he'd reythar a-stopped, but the lawyer have made him promise ; but you can't do no good, you'll only be ill agen, you'd better stop wi' we."

"I never thought I should have lived to come here, but I have, and now I'm a-going on," replied the girl sorrowfully ; "I wanted to see all of you once more, that's why I comed here first ; and I thought maybe as you'd lend me your boots—'tis a long way, and just look at mine !"

She shewed the small, delicately-shaped foot, encased in a pair of thin shoes, full of holes, that would let in the wet at every step.

“ ’Tisn’t that I mind walking without any,” she said, “ I’m used to that, but I couldn’t go into the court without some on ; besides, if it should chance to rain, I’d rather keep dry ; I mind the wet more than I used. Oh ! Sally, I do feel very ill !”

And she began to cry. She had not been much given to this sort of thing till lately, but she was so weak she could often now not restrain her tears.

“ I’d rather you wasn’t going, Molly—that you’d stop wi we’,” said the other ; but she only shook her head in reply.

“ You can have the boots, then,” continued Sally, “ only let me have them again, or mother’ll scold, because they’s most new ; not that her minds much about anything now—we’s all broken down like, father and all.”

And Sally began to cry too. But after a minute or two she began to wipe her eyes, and to wonder whether Molly could really help her brother ; so, after bringing the boots,

and fitting them on, and finding that, although a great deal too large, Molly could manage to walk in them very well, another idea struck her.

“ You can’t go in, Molly, and speak to the gentlefolks wi’out a bonnet for sure—they won’t let ’ee in.”

“ I ain’t a-got none,” said Molly.

“ I’ve a-got most a new one,” replied Sally ;
“ I airned it myself at the braiding ; I wore it over to Sadbroke to the tay-feast.”

It was a sad recollection. How gay she thought herself that afternoon as she walked with her brother and Jem, and in what a strait were they both now. But she was very proud of her bonnet still. She brought it out of its hiding-place ; it looked very gay, with its bright red roses, in strange contrast to their sad faces, stained and flushed as they were, with still undried tears.

Molly did not admire it quite as much as her friend expected ; perhaps she was too ill, and too anxious to admire anything just then ;

but she allowed Sally to put it on her. Sally then went back a few steps to look at it.

“It’s a raal beauty, Molly,” said she; “and it do suit you just as if ’twere your very own; they red roses look so nice on your dark hair; it’s a lovely bonnet, as I always thought it was.”

Sally must really have been very fond of her brother, and had great faith in Molly, to trust her with the bonnet; but although she was not past admiring it, she was very unhappy about Jack, and would have done or given anything she could to have helped him, in the least degree.

“I suppose it’s more respectable like than my shawl,” said Molly, doubtfully, “and I’ll wear it and thankee.”

Her friend was now holding up the little cracked looking-glass before her, that she might see it for herself. Molly, however, scarcely looked, but continued, as if a thought just then struck her mind.

“But, Sall, you’d better tell your feyther to look arter the bonnet; if I should die over there, and never see none of you more, that he may bring it you back agen; I wouldn’t like you to lose it.”

“Oh! Molly! Molly!” said her friend, sobbing now in right earnest, “don’t’ee talk of dying too; and what matters the bonnet, when we’s all a-going to wear black for Tom, and Jack, too, maybe. Oh! dear! oh! dear! and no money to buy it wi’, and father and mother all broken-hearted, and me too! Oh! never mind the bonnet, Molly, it be nothing to I now.”

And she sat down on the side of the bed, and rocked herself backwards and forwards, Molly sitting by her, rocking herself and sobbing too.

Presently Molly started up.

“I must see Tom,” said she, and she dashed away the tears almost angrily with the back of her hand.

Tom was too weak to leave his bed now, and Sally led her into the other little room.

“Here be Molly, Tom,” said she.

“I thought I heerd her voice,” he replied ; “I knew her’d come. Oh ! Molly, ’tis sorrow as have lighted down on all we now.”

“’Tis the Lord’s will, Tom,” replied she, “so you always said, and the Lord can help when he will.”

“Yes he can,” said Tom, “I never doubt that now ; and I’m going to see Him where He is, before long ; but, oh ! Molly, Molly, think of Jack !”

And Tom sobbed aloud.

She drove back her tears with a great effort.

“Jack’s in His hands, the same as you, Tom, he’ve not a-sarved Him as he ought, and the sorrow’s come ; but maybe there’ll be help sent at the last ; I think as there will be ; and you pray, Tom—pray that it may be so.”

She paused for a moment and then added—

“I’m not long for this world nother; don’t you mind your mother used to say so? I thought her must know, but I never felt it then as I does now; and, Tom,” she said solemnly, “the last work as I does on airth will be to go to Chesterton to speak for Jack.”

He looked at her astonished; he had heard his mother say she thought the girl would not live long, but to Tom she had always seemed so strong, he could not understand her getting about so, if she was ill; he knew the difficulty it had been to him for some time to walk, but now, as he looked at her, he thought her strangely altered. He pressed the hand that had been resting in his.

“Don’t’ee go to Chesterton, Molly,” he said —“it can’t do no good; perhaps the Lord, as you said just now, will hear; and you stop wi’ me, and pray to Him, and let father go, you’re too ill to be travelling about so—you’ll only be frightened, and that will make you worse.”

“ I’m never frightened, Tom—never,” she replied ; “ I’m so used to seeing folks, I don’t mind it ; but if ever I had been, I’m past all that now ;” she lowered her voice—“ feyther left me for good ; he wasn’t kind, but I’ve no one now ; there’s no need to say it, but I just tells you, I’ve nought to live for, Tom—but, plase God, you’ll see Jack back agen, if you don’t never see me.”

“ Oh ! don’t’ee go away, Molly, come back, do come back, and stop wi’ we. Mother’s real fond of you, and her’ll do her best for’ee, I knows ; and maybe you’ll get strong agen.”

“ Tom, you and I am both of us going into another world—that world of which the Bible do spake, of which Miss Maude used to sing. You pray that we may meet there—it won’t be long for neither o’ we now ; the time may seem very weary while it’s a-passing, but there’ll be a blessing that we none of us knows then.”

“ ‘ Where the wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary are at rest,’ ” said Tom.

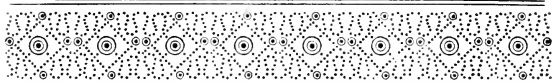
It is only such as are suffering from the effects of sin and sorrow, and looking, too, at the near deliverance, as they were, who can enter fully into the meaning of the words.

She sunk on her knees by the bedside, and joined her sobs with Tom's. Presently she rose, and, kissing Tom's forehead, said,

“Pray the Lord as He'll send you back, Jack—I thinks as He will; and then tell Jack as I thought of him, and did what I could for him—and tell him to mind that he meets both o' we above yon sky!”

She pointed up where the moon and stars were now seen shining brightly through the little window, and, without speaking again to any of the others, went out into the cold night.





CHAPTER XIII.

THE CONSULTATION AT CHESTERTON.

THE dull, quiet, country town of Chesterton was astir with life. For a week or so all the houses would be full—all the streets gay with carriages and passengers—there would be a ball, and dinner-parties, and parties of all kinds ; and then the judges and barristers, and all the people who had been collected together, would again depart, and the town would relapse into its normal state of quiescence, until the round of time would bring the same thing there over again.

There was the usual pomp and state at the entrance of the judges : the fine old church was

thronged at the service, the organ sounded out its grandest tones, there was the show and pomp and circumstance, and yet, amid all this, surely there were many hearts that responded to the pleading words of the psalm that came in due course in the morning service :

“ Let the sorrowful sighing of the prisoners come before Thee ; preserve thou those who are appointed unto death.”

It was rather a heavy calendar ; the rioters from Sadborough were to take their trial, and there were many other cases, but that which caused the greatest interest was the trial of the boys for the case of arson at Sadport. The magnitude of the offence, and, at the same time, the youth of the prisoners, made it one of more than common interest, and the town was unusually crowded.

The state of feeling so lately evinced at Sadborough had made the officials particularly anxious that there should be nothing like disturbance ; and altogether the Lent Assizes at

Chesterton of 18— were looked forward to with more than usual concern throughout the country.

By dint of good nursing, and great care and quiet, James Knightly, looking still a shadow of his former self, was able to be there. Hamilton had arrived from town, and they had talked together long and anxiously over the case ; it was quite plain that the evidence of the curate, as to Jack Martin's being at home the evening of the fire, must stand him in good stead ; but what had become of Mary ? They felt now quite hopeless as to her returning in time ; it appeared as if she must have left the neighbourhood on purpose.

James had been permitted to have an interview with the prisoners ; it had been an affecting one—even Jem Brown was thoroughly broken down now, he was too young to be altogether hardened—indeed, he never had been so ; he had been badly brought up, having had no right principles instilled into him ;

he was one easily led, and, like all such, more easily to wrong than right.

The curate spoke to both of them very solemnly, but cautiously avoided asking either of them respecting his guilt or innocence ; he would have shrunk from hearing Jem declare himself innocent of the crime, as he did not believe he was so, and he was unwilling to become the depository of so tremendous a secret. He therefore contented himself with pressing on them the simple truths of the Gospel of Christ—the invitation to all, whoever they might be, and however laden with sin, to come to Him who could alone heal, and that without any human intervention ; and concluded with earnest prayer that He would even now, in this deep hour of need, watch over and undertake for them.

Both the boys wept bitterly ; they were still too young not to break down at such a time, and Jack sobbed out—

“ I never did, sir—never ! ”

And the clergyman believed him.

As he was returning, just as he came to the door of the inn, a girl came up to him. He did not recognise her at first in the change of her dress, but the moment she spoke, he knew her.

“Where have you been, Mary?” he asked.

He was inclined to be angry with her; he had still not quite given over his idea that it had been through her that Jack had got into mischief; her absence strengthened this belief, and he hardly looked upon her as a credible witness.

“I’ve been ill,” she answered, very gravely. “Can I spake to the gentleman as will spake up for Jack to-morrow?”

Of course it was his intention she should do so; he took her into the room where Hamilton was sitting with the lawyer, still anxiously looking over the papers, and endeavouring to find, if they could, anything that might throw new light on the case.

They looked up when James entered, and seeing the girl, at once conjectured who she was. When she came into the light, it was evident that she was ill; and she trembled and made one or two vain efforts to speak. Hamilton thought she was frightened at finding herself in their presence; but James knew her better—she was never shy or timid, her rambling life had knocked any feeling of that sort out of her long ago, and it was not her natural disposition. But now a great awe was come upon her. She knew, and she alone, with the exception of the two boys themselves, how perfectly, how entirely innocent was Jack Martin—the boy who had almost been the first person who had ever spoken a kind word to her, whom she had clung to ever since, whom she loved as only such natures as hers can love, and whose life now depended on the evidence that she could give—she the wandering Irish girl, who probably no one would believe—no one even attend to.

She was perfectly aware that what she said never was believed by the people with whom she generally came in contact ; and was it possible that the Lord Judge and all the great lawyers would even hear her, or let her speak ?

But the strength of truth, the knowledge that it was the truth she was about to speak, upheld her, and made her believe, in spite of the feeling of her own weakness, that she must be heard ; and more than this, the deep sense that had come upon her, that she herself would ere long be standing in the presence of the Eternal Judge, swallowed up all minor feelings, and gave a beauty of expression to her face, that more than compensated for the sad, wan, haggard, look of illness, and which lent a grace even to Sally's bonnet with the red rose.

So marked, so visible was this expression, it made both the young men involuntarily feel that they could not dare to doubt her words—

indeed could not possibly do so in their hearts, had they dared to express it.

James put her a chair, and poured her out a glass of wine. She took a sip or two, and then tried to eat a biscuit—she knew she must do so.

“Do not hurry yourself,” said Hamilton, kindly, returning to his papers, to give her time to collect her thoughts.

In a few minutes she got up, so softly, that he did not hear her, and, standing before him, said—

“I’m ready now, plase, sir, to tell yer all that I knows.”

“Then tell me all you know,” he replied ; “and be very careful not to say one word more than you are quite sure is true, and then I shall be able to know whether you will be of any use as a witness for the prisoners.

She began her tale :

“I’d a-been out wi’ the skewers and the laces, and was a-coming home round into Duck

Lane—I was going into Duck Lane. I used to go and see Tom often; he liked it. Mr. Knightly knows as I did.”

She looked at him for confirmation of this; he nodded acquiescence, without speaking, and she continued:

“But afore I went in I seed Jack come out, and Jem Brown wi’ him. So I didn’t go in, but stop’t outside to see which way they went.”

“Why did you do that?” inquired Hamilton.

She hesitated a minute, and then said:

“I was afeared there’d be something wrong!”

“What made you fear it?”

“I’d heerd Jem talk often of doing something, I didn’t well know what; but I’d a sort of feeling then I’d like to know where they went.”

“Well, go on.”

She continued:

“They went on right down Lady’s Lane, and I followed ’em; ’twas rather dusk, but not dark. Just where Wolf’s Road and Lady’s Lane meet, out into the straight road that leads down to the port, a woman past us; I seed her look, for Jem was a-striking sparks. They had a-been speaking soft all the way down; I couldn’t hear what ’em said, I wasn’t near enough, for I didn’t want ’em to know I was there; but then Jack a-spokt out, and said: ‘I’m a-going home!’ and he turned right round. Jem called arter him, and said: ‘What a fool you must be, Jack, to think as I meant anything; I shall go on a bit further, and then go home too. You be a reg’lar fool not to come down to see the tide, but you can go if you likes!’ Jack didn’t answer no more, but went right away home; and Jem went on, and then I turned too. Jack stopped a bit at the corner of Five-finger Street, and I went on, and saw Mr. Knightly go into the Martins’ house, and in a minute

or two Jack came up the street and went in too; but I stopped out, and spoke to Mr. Knightly when he comed out, as he knows. It's all true, every word of it, your honour; I'd not a-come here to spake what's not true, and I going into another world afore there's many more suns have a-shone over us!"

"There's a turn to the right, a narrow lane that turns out of the straight road, and goes up behind the stores," said Hamilton; "did you see whether Jem Brown went that way, or down to the water?"

"I didn't look arter he," she replied, wearily; "we weren't quite come to the lane, but I heerd his steps going on as if he went right along down to the say."

Hamilton knew that it would be proved on the trial that Jem had been seen coming out of this lane a very short time before the fire was discovered; but it was not improbable that he did go on straight at first, and turn afterwards.

“How came you to follow the boys?” asked James.

He thought he would try the question again ; he wished to find out whether she was herself in any way implicated. Her wan cheek was suffused with a bright glow, and the tears started into her eyes.

“The Martins had all been kind, down-right good to me, and my mind misgived me somehow. As I said afore, I thought I’d like to know whether there was anything wrong. I think your rivirence,” she added, speaking solemnly, and looking at the clergyman, “’twas good angels, or, maybe, the blessed Lord himself, if it’s not wrong to say so”—and she crossed herself as she spoke—“that bore it in so strong on my mind that night to go down, and that made me spake to you when you comed out !”

Her hearers were rather inclined to think the same ; even the solicitor, a much older man, and one of a decidedly more worldly

stamp of character than the other two, was affected by the girl's manner—for many people who do not altogether believe in an overruling Providence in small events, will yet allow that He does interfere oftentimes, in a way that none can doubt, in a matter of life or death. The gentlemen spoke together a little—the girl caught a word.

“You needn't fear me going away, if that's what you're saying!” she said. “Why, do'ee think I comed here, and I scarce able to walk? I shall be ready the morrow. I wish you good even!”

And before any one could stop her, even had they wished to do so, she had left the room.

“I have no fear of her leaving,” said James; “she spoke to me of her own accord, and came voluntarily to give her evidence; she will certainly be present when called on to-morrow. But what do you think of her information?” he asked, anxiously.

“Were she what is considered a credible witness, it would undoubtedly save the boy’s life; but one can hardly tell what opinion the jury will take respecting it; even her rare beauty is almost against her—I fear she will not be considered a reputable witness,” said Hamilton.

“Mr. Knightly’s evidence strongly corroborates the truth of hers,” said the lawyer. “The two considered together must have much weight; and, really, if I was on the jury, I should not like to condemn that boy. She spoke in such a way, one can hardly help believing her; but, unfortunately, her evidence bears very heavily against the other prisoner—nothing, I believe, now, will save him.”

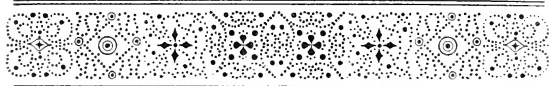
Hamilton sighed, and James looked so pale that the lawyer got up, saying :

“There is nothing more I can do, and if you make yourself so anxious, Mr. Knightly, you will be hardly able to give evidence to-

morrow. Pray think no more of it ; all has been done that can be, and we must trust that the youth of the prisoners will be taken into consideration. I think we may consider one—and that, fortunately, the oldest of the two—is fairly safe. But pray take rest,” he added, “ we cannot do without you !”

But it was advice easier given than taken, and the young men talked the matter over till late into the night.





CHAPTER XIV.

THE LENT ASSIZES.

IT was the last day of the assizes. The court was thronged at an early hour. The prisoners were the objects of interest to all. Sadly changed were they from the thoughtless boys of a few weeks since. Those weeks had passed over their heads like years. They were fully alive now—not the less so from the visit of James Knightly the preceding evening—to the fearful position in which they were placed.

The case was opened by the counsel for the prosecution. The speech was little more than a plain statement of facts, as far as he had been able to collect them; and, as the facts

were put together, one seemed to fit into another with terrible exactness. A dreadful fire had taken place at Sadport on the evening of the 20th of last month. There was no idea on the minds of any that it had taken place accidentally; the men at work left before the daylight was over; but the proof was especially in the fact, that the flames had first been seen issuing from the thatch of a small shed, that was on one side of the store, and connected with it. The prisoners had been seen together on previous occasions at the port, and a favourite sport of the boys seemed to be that of igniting sparks, by means of a flint and steel. On the evening of the fire, and very shortly before it broke out, they had been seen together close by the store of Messrs. Gain and Twine, the one which was the first on fire, and which had, undoubtedly, caught from the shed previously referred to. One of the boys had also been observed to leave the lane at the back of the store within

five minutes of the time when the fire actually broke out. There could be little doubt but that the other had been there also—only, probably, he had left somewhat earlier, or had escaped observation in the darkness of the night.

A most fearful destruction of property had taken place, the inflammable nature of the contents of the buildings having given unusual power to the flames. It was an unfortunate circumstance that so much thatch should have been in the immediate neighbourhood, offering, as it did, facility for the perpetration of such crimes as the present. But this did not alter the fact, nor in any way lessen the heinousness of the crime, which was one of the most fearful that could be imagined ; and, as the fire at Sadport had fully proved, one so easily perpetrated, one so fearfully destructive in its consequences, and from the effects of which the owners of property could in no way secure themselves.

The first witness called was Eliza Sims, the poor widow of Sadport ; very interesting she looked in her widow's cap and deep mourning, and was visibly affected as she gave her evidence. She was going into Sadborough on the evening of the 20th of February ; she had her baby with her, and left two other children asleep in the cottage ; it was on the further end of the store from that on which the fire broke out ; she was quite sure she left her house safe—she was very particular, on the children's account ; besides, the thatch caught fire first on the outside. As she was going on, she met two boys—it was getting dusk, not dark ; but she hardly knew that she should have noticed them, had it not been that her attention was called towards them by their striking some sparks of light ; she thought nothing of it, boys were often doing such things. It was rather a dark part of the road, but a light in a cottage window made her see them distinctly. One of them turned

his face round towards her—it was Jack Martin, she was quite sure—she knew the Martins very well. (Here she sobbed and almost broke down ; the remembrance of seeing the boy's father fall from the ladder with her child in his arms, whom he had rescued at the peril of his own life, came before her. It was some minutes before she could proceed.) The other boy was Jem Brown ; she knew him very well by sight ; she had often seen him down at Sadport, in company with the other prisoner ; she could not be mistaken.

She was asked one or two questions by the prisoners' counsel.

“ Did she meet anyone else on the road ? ”

“ Yes, there was a girl a little further on ; she did not recognise her—she was walking under the shadow of the hedge.”

“ Was she going the same way ? ”

“ Yes, down to the port.”

“ Did she pass anyone else ? ”

“No, not till she got into the town.”

“What time was it when she left her home?”

“She hardly knew—she thought rather more than half-past six.”

“How long would it take her to walk into Sadborough from Sadport?”

“About a quarter of an hour generally ; but she had the baby with her, and was not strong—she did not go very quick ; besides, she went to the other end of the town—it was past seven when she reached her friend’s house—she heard the clock strike as she went through the High Street.”

“Did she speak to anyone in the town?”

“Mr. Knightly spoke to her—it was just before she turned into the High Street.”

The next witness called was a man, who said that at half-past seven he was passing by Gain and Twine’s store ; as he did so, he saw a boy come out of the lane that ran at the back—the boy was Jem Brown. In less

than five minutes after he saw fire coming out of the thatch of the shed ; he immediately gave the alarm, but the flames caught so quickly, the inside of the place was all on fire before the engines could reach the spot.

“Did he see anyone else besides Jem Brown?”

“No one else.”

“How did he know it was him, as it was then getting quite dark?”

“The boy almost ran against him, and it was light enough to see anyone so near as that.”

A sailor of Sadport then gave evidence as to seeing the prisoners together the day after the return of the *Lady Bertha*, down on the pier. One of them was striking a light, he didn't know which ; he thought nothing of that then, nor now neither—boys always was at mischief o' some sort. He sent them off, for fear of an accident, and to make them mind 'twasn't right to let youngsters go on as they'd like ; but never thought they'd

nothing to do wi' the fire—'twas an accident—accidents did happen.

The judge told him sternly he was not asked what he thought, only what he had seen, so he had nothing more to state. But on being asked by the prisoners' counsel whether he had seen the boys together since, replied—

“No, 'twern't they—'twere the White Lady herself!” for which remark he received another and more severe reprimand; which he bore, however, with perfect indifference, or rather with the somewhat self-satisfied air of a person who has given a valuable opinion, and who is not answerable for consequences if it is disregarded.

This ended the case for the prosecution.

The witnesses for the prisoners were next called. The first was James Knightly. He knew both the boys; one of them belonged to the village of Sadbroke, of which place he was curate. On the evening of the fire

he was calling at the cottage of the father of the other, Jack Martin. As he passed down Fivefinger Street, out of which Duck Lane turned, the clock struck seven; he had not been in the cottage above a minute or two, when the prisoner came in; he sat on a chair by the door, but the witness was quite sure he did not go out again during the time he was there. He stayed at the cottage longer than he had intended; after he left, he looked at his watch, as he went down Fivefinger Street—it was twenty minutes to eight. He called at one or two other houses, but did not stay. Just as he reached home, he heard the cry of “Fire!” and went down at once to Sadport; by the time he reached the place, the fire had gained great power. It was in consequence of the inflammable nature of the things in the store. He was cross-examined by the counsel for the prosecution.

“You say that the boy came in a minute or two after yourself—how long might that be?”

“Almost immediately.”

“Twenty minutes, perhaps, or a quarter of an hour?”

“Certainly not; I am quite sure it was not five minutes—he must have followed me in closely.”

“And he did not leave again?”

“Not while I was there.”

“It was late for you to be out after an illness—did you say it was seven when you went into the cottage?”

“The church clock struck seven as I came down the street—it was more than half-past when I left.”

“I think you were hurt at the fire, and that the prisoner’s father saved your life?”

There was a murmur of disapprobation at this question, but the prisoner’s counsel did not object; perhaps he had not time to do so, as it was answered at once.

“He was the one on the ladder when I fainted; there were other men—they would

any of them have assisted—and did so, as I was afterwards told.”

Job Martin was now put in the witness-box, his arm still in a sling, and his face bound up. Much commiseration was felt for him, and pitying eyes were turned upon him from all parts of the court. His evidence confirmed that of the former witness, as to his son's return home—he did not leave again. He himself left home when he heard the cry of “Fire!” and went down to assist; when he left, Jack was still in the house.

So far as this went it was satisfactory; but there was yet one more witness, the Irish girl, and the prisoners' counsel was very anxious to observe how her evidence would be received.

She looked very different to what she had done the evening before; all traces of fatigue and illness seemed to have vanished; she had a far brighter colour than any of those who knew her ever remembered to have seen her

with, and her eyes looked larger and more lustrous than ever.

A very close observer might have thought they were too lustrous, and have noticed the quick-drawn breath, and the convulsive way in which she spoke at first ; but if any did notice it, they only considered it proceeded from nervousness ; and though her beauty was more remarkable that day than it had ever been before, and therefore called forth many remarks, there was none in that large assembly who really cared even the least for the poor friendless girl.

Mr. Saxon had often seen her in the streets of Sadborough with her skewers and her laces, but he only regarded her with distrust and suspicion ; one of those who would steal some of his spoons, if she had the opportunity. A low Irish Roman Catholic, she would, he felt sure, do harm among his parishioners ; it had never even entered his imagination he could do her any good.

James Knightly, when he saw her at Mrs.

Brown's, had looked on her with something of the same feeling. When, however, she spoke to him that evening in the lane, he felt rather interested in her. He would see if something could not be done for the poor child on the morrow; but when the morrow came, he was laid on a bed of sickness, and unable to help anyone; and now again he almost forgot her in his interest for the boys.

The older among the barristers thought the case must be a very bad one if the prisoners' counsel relied at all on her evidence; the younger members of the bar wondered what could be the tie between the beautiful girl in the witness-box, and the awkward peasant boy at the bar; and sentimentalized dreamily about woman's love. The prisoners' counsel and solicitor regarded her undoubtedly with great interest. To them she was "the witness" on whose evidence much depended, and that was all; she was nothing to anyone there—nothing!

Jack glanced round, and wondered what had brought her. She couldn't care for helping him—he could think of no one but himself then. Poor—poor Molly!

She was asked if she understood the nature of an oath. Thanks to Tom's teaching, she was able to answer the simple questions asked satisfactorily, and was allowed to give her evidence. She remembered the night of the 20th of February; she was going down to Sadport. She passed a woman just where Lady's Lane and Wolf's Road joined into the road that leads down to the port. There were two boys going on before her. Just after they passed the woman, one of them turned and went back to Sadborough. It was Jack Martin; she knew him as he passed. She did not go all the way down to the port, she returned towards home. In Fivefinger Street she saw Mr. Knightly; he did not speak to her; the clock struck seven as he passed. Jack Martin was in the street at the same time as

she was ; he soon turned up Duck Lane, and went home. That was all she knew.

“ What took you down to the port ?” asked the counsel for the prosecution.

“ The road was free,” she replied ; “ I’d so much right to go down as Mrs. Sims to come up.”

“ You were with the prisoners, I imagine ?” said the barrister.

“ No, I were not ; I never spokt to neither of ’em, I followed them down. I stopt till Jack comed back, then I comed. He did not know I were there.”

“ Jack is your sweetheart, I suppose ?” said the barrister ; “ or perhaps you like two strings to your bow ?”

She shot such a glance of scorn and contempt from her full dark eye, that, used as he was to this sort of thing, he wished he had not asked the question, but she answered very quietly :

“ I’m thinking of none such thing, yer

honour ; I comed here to spake the truth. I as shall spake it in another world ere long. It's the truth, and nought else !”

“ What became of the other prisoner, when you say Jack Martin turned back ?”

“ He went straight on, I believe ; but I never looked no more, I comed back.”

“ And saw Mr. Knightly ?”

“ Yes, I saw he.”

“ What time was it ?”

“ The clock struck seven.”

The curate of Sadbroke was recalled.

“ Did he see the girl as he went towards Duck Lane ?”

“ Yes, she was standing by a lamp-post.”

Farmer Stuart was called.

He gave both the boys a fair character. They had worked for him before the fire at his farm. He did not consider they had either of them had anything to do with that. If they had got into mischief, it was in consequence of having nothing to do.

The counsel for the defence now spoke. He was rather new to it, and the momentous idea of how much depended on him, shook him a little at first ; but he soon gained courage, and showed that he was equal to the task he had undertaken.

He began by speaking of the youth of the prisoners. They might have been led into mischief, into wrong doing ; but it was hardly credible that by themselves they could have committed a crime of such enormity.

With respect to the evidence of Eliza Sims. She had met two boys ; she stated they were the prisoners at the bar, but what was there unusual in boys of their age going down to see the tide and the shipping ? they were in the constant habit of doing it, as the other witnesses had proved. What perhaps might appear to the jury as a significant fact, when connected with the outburst of the fire, was their being possessed of a tinder-box, and their having been seen striking sparks. But he would

appeal to them. Was this not a favourite sport with many boys? were they not, all of them, when they were boys, in the constant habit of lighting gunpowder, and making playthings of things that were undoubtedly dangerous? As one of the witnesses had said, Boys always were in mischief; but that was a different, a totally different thing to being engaged in a premeditated act like that which was now charged upon them.

They had often been seen doing it before, it was therefore evidently a mere trick, a boyish trick, to which no importance whatever ought to be attached.

But he would speak of them separately—of each as an individual life, as an individual being, to help whom, in his hour of need, he had made himself responsible.

With respect to Jack Martin, it had been stated, by unexceptionable witnesses, that he was at home almost immediately after seven o'clock; he must, therefore, have left Sadport

nearly a quarter of an hour earlier ; and this, he thought, was quite sufficient to clear him of any participation in the act ; as, with the strong wind then blowing, the flames must have burst forth from the dry thatch in far less time.

But there was another witness, one, he thought, whom they could not look at nor listen to without an innate conviction of the truth of what she so positively asserted. She declared the boy had turned before he came near the place where the fire broke out ; and he earnestly implored them not to turn away lightly from evidence given with such manifest simplicity and truthfulness.

With respect to the younger prisoner, he allowed the case was more involved in difficulty ; but he could not think that was any reason for condemnation—merely a cause for closer scrutiny, for more anxious consideration. Could they suppose, dare they suppose for one moment, that a boy of that age, a mere

child—he was little more than fifteen—alone, after his companion had left him, could have gone on to commit a premeditated act of destruction. He thought they would consider it wholly impossible.

Public feeling had been highly excited at Sadborough, in consequence of the events that had lately taken place there, otherwise suspicion could never even have fallen on such young heads.

What an inconceivably careless thing it was to have thatch in such close proximity to a store full of such inflammable goods! How could the owners have allowed it to remain there? They surely must have been aware that an occurrence like that which had taken place was one that might occur at any time. Might not one of the workmen, or a sailor with a lighted pipe, have let a spark fall on this thatch, that had been the cause of all the mischief? Neither was it by any means proved, notwithstanding all that had been

said on the subject, that the fire might not have broken out first in the inside, and caught from that to the thatch, where it was first actually seen.

Indeed, this was his own full belief; the more he thought on that point, and he had given his attention very much to it, the more he felt sure it was so—the mass of the fire inside could only be accounted for by the fact of the ignition having taken place inside.

But were the evidence very much stronger against the prisoners than it was, he would rather himself believe anything than that boys like those who now stood before them had committed intentionally and alone such an act; it surely required quite a stretch of imagination to conceive such an idea. It might have been done accidentally. He was speaking to those who must well remember the time when they were boys themselves, and who could, doubtless, each recollect some careless act which might have led to fearful conse-

quences had they not happily been averted ; and he begged them to consider, whether, in the event (which he could hardly contemplate) that they should conclude that it had occurred by the doing of these boys, if it might not have been a like act of thoughtless folly.

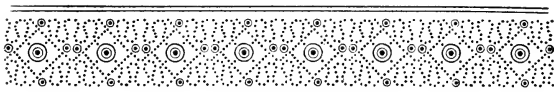
He believed that they, like himself, would infinitely prefer considering it the result of any accident, rather than that English boys—one the son of the witness, who, as they had themselves seen, had been severely injured by his great exertions at the fire, and the other the only son of a widowed mother—had been guilty of such an act.

In the one case, there was, he considered, the certainty of innocence ; in the other, to say the very least, there were grave doubts ; and would they be instrumental to the taking away a young life, if there was any, even the least, doubt?

He left the prisoners confidently in their hands, believing that they would receive jus-

tice; fully relying that a calm consideration of the facts must lead them to look favourably upon the unfortunate boys, whose youthful carelessness had laid them open to so fearful an accusation. If they believed them guilty, it must be so; but if they had any doubt, even the shadow of a doubt, then, as they would each one day look themselves for mercy, he prayed them to give the prisoners the benefit of that doubt.





CHAPTER XV.

THE VERDICT.

THE case was ended ; there was nothing more to be said on either side.

Then followed the summing up of the judge; one of those calm, clear statements, in which everything that has been previously mixed together in what has appeared almost inextricable confusion, finds at once its right and fitting place; from which can be discovered the value of the evidence given by the different witnesses, and how far the pleading of the opposite counsel has been impartial or overstrained; one of those speeches which make Englishmen

proud of the administration of the English law, and of those who administer it.

The time had not been long since prisoners had been allowed to plead by counsel; before that time, according to old English law, as laid down by Blackstone, the judge had been the prisoners' counsel; now, however, they were allowed to have one to speak for them, and the business of the judge was confined more to the simple placing of things in their right position—summing up, as it is called.

“Gentlemen of the Jury,” he began, and there was a breathless stillness, all were anxious to know how the conflicting evidence would appear to the clear mind before whom it had been placed, “the case before us is one of great magnitude and of special importance, not only with respect to the amount of property that has been destroyed in this particular instance, but also from the fact that it is a crime against which ordinary precautions do not avail—a crime which can be, and is, so

often perpetrated without detection, that when a fair case of the kind is brought before us, it needs the most careful deliberation.

“The youth of the prisoners also demands peculiar consideration; not that one life is more valuable than another in the regard of the Maker of all, but because, in the case of those under age, we are bound to take into consideration all those circumstances which render youths of their years more liable than others to place themselves, from carelessness and thoughtlessness, in equivocal positions—positions which would be avoided by those who, from mature age, have become more cautious as to the view that might be taken of such positions.

“You have been informed by a credible witness that, on the night of the twentieth of February, when the fire at Sadport took place, the two prisoners, now at the bar, were seen proceeding in that direction; also by others that they had been often in company together

before that time, and that they were frequently engaged in a foolish trick of striking fire by means of a flint and steel.

“ One witness also informs you that the younger of the two was seen to emerge from a lane that leads to the spot, where the fire is supposed to have broken out, a very short time before it was discovered.

With respect to the elder prisoner, you have been informed, on good authority, that he was at home that evening by seven o'clock ; and, supposing it would have taken him from ten minutes to a quarter of an hour to reach his home from that spot, this leaves as much as three quarters of an hour for the fire to have been discovered in after he left, supposing him to be the perpetrator ; and it rests with you to say whether you believe, considering the high wind and the light materials with which the fire had to deal, it could have been hidden so long.

“ But there is one other witness who states

most positively that John Martin did not go so far as the place where the fire broke out; and I think that on your opinion of the credibility of this witness principally hinges the discovery of the innocence or guilt of the elder of the two prisoners now before you.

“ With respect to James Brown, his counsel has ably stated the unlikelihood of one so young perpetrating so fearful an act; yet the doing it was but a small thing. ‘ Behold how great a matter a little spark kindleth!’ must have been in the thoughts of all who witnessed the fearful spectacle visible that evening at Sadport, and who knew that it came from a small light placed in the thatch of a little shed! That it might have been caused by the accidental conduct of a careless boy, has also been urged on your consideration. In this case, notwithstanding the fearful consequences that resulted, it would bear a totally different aspect than if looked on as a premeditated crime, or intentional act of guilt.

“In conclusion, as the youth of the prisoners, and the fact that arson is a capital offence, may materially tend to induce you to look leniently on the crime, I would beg you to dismiss from your minds all the after-consequences of the verdict. The responsibility of the law being as it is, rests with those who made the law, not with those who have to administer it. If you believe either or both of the prisoners now before you to be guilty, you owe it to God, to your country, to your own consciences, that your verdict should be in accordance with that belief. If you believe, on the contrary, that either or both are innocent, you will record the fact. Or if, after most careful deliberation, you still feel that there is a doubt in your minds that you cannot solve, it will equally be your duty to give either or both the prisoners, as the case may be, the benefit of the doubt.”

The jury retired to consider their verdict. The prisoners were removed. A few persons .

went out of court, but not many; public anxiety had been wrought up to a high pitch, and they were fearful of not regaining their seats, or of being absent when the verdict was given.

The summing up was considered on the whole favourable; but the feeling among the jury was believed to be rather in the contrary direction. The speeches and riots at SADBorough, the many incendiary fires that had taken place around, many even near to Chesterton—all spoke of danger, that must be vigorously met and put down; and there was a determination among men of their class that it should be so.

Capital punishment was that awarded by law in such cases; and there were many who considered that the time was come when an example must be made by what they looked upon as the only means of putting down crime. It was a wonder, if the world was to be regenerated in this manner, that crime still

went on, considering the many examples that were made, when time after time some poor wretch, or wretches, were made to expiate wrongs far less than this fire at Sadport, had been, by the sacrifice of their lives, a sacrifice that could not undo the wrong or benefit any.

The jury were undecided for some time, but only upon one point—the evidence of the Irish girl. One of them, not the foreman, but a man whose opinion had weight with the others, said—

“The maid is dying; you mayn’t think it, but I’ve seen one like it before”—and his voice faltered, as he recollected the occasion—“the maid’s dying, and knows it; and I will never go against what I look on as a dying testimony—not if I sit here till to-morrow morning; but don’t hurry for me, consider over it for yourselves.”

And they did consider it, giving it all their best attention, as Englishmen should do, and

ever do, in such cases ; and it was two hours before they re-appeared.

The prisoners were waiting to hear their doom ; with what a weary, anxious look, did the poor boys strive, as it were, to read the faces of those who they knew had even now settled their fate. Was it for weal or for woe ? for life or for death ? They felt as if they could not live while it was being told—as if the telling must be as sure death as that which awaited them, if the decision was adverse. The silence was so still, it seemed as if every heart in the assembly had almost stopped beating, while, with strained faces and listening ears, all leant forward to hear the doom. The few formularies that had to be gone through appeared as though they took hours in the arranging. At length were the words spoken :

“Not Guilty, John Martin—Guilty, James Brown !”

The breaths that had been held while the

words were speaking, were drawn back again with heavy sighs. There was the deepest attention as the judge again spoke.

“John Martin,” he said, solemnly, “a jury of your countrymen have pronounced you guiltless of the charge that has been hanging over you, of having participated in the fire at Sadport; but you could never have been placed in such an awful position had you not been in the company of those who caused you to be suspected. You have had a tremendous warning—may the remembrance of what you have now suffered be a lesson to you for ever—it is far more likely to be so than anything I can say.”

Then assuming the fearful black cap, the terrible insignia of death, that scene the most awful, perhaps, that can be witnessed on earth, took place—one mortal being sentencing another in cold blood, and in the name of justice, to lose that life which none can bestow.

“It is not I who sentence you,” said the

learned judge—"it is the law, of which I am only the minister. You have had a perfectly fair trial; the evidence has been carefully weighed—every extenuating circumstance has been pleaded, but I never could myself see, all through, the slightest cause to doubt your guilt; it only now remains for me to record the sentence adjudged by the law,"—here followed the fearful sentence in the usual form—"and may the Lord have mercy on your soul!"

The words of the judge had been in a great measure inaudible, except to those who were very near; he was evidently deeply affected, but he strove to speak the last words aloud. There was a moment's intense stillness, then sobs were heard from many parts of the court, and the unhappy boy fell heavily on the ground, and was removed in a state of complete insensibility.



CHAPTER XVI.

THE FATE OF THE RED ROSE.

PEOPLE'S minds had been wrought up to such a state of tension, anything of certainty was in some measure a relief. They drew long breaths, and tried to think it was nothing. It had been expected—it was a very clear case ; they hoped now there would be an end of incendiarism in the neighbourhood. There was much shaking of hands and speaking to friends, and, the court soon cleared, the barristers and most of those present were engaged to dinner-parties, and many were going to the Assize ball in the evening. The solicitor for the prosecution, a hard thorough-

working lawyer, had two young clerks with him; the lads were shocked—their spirits were weighed down at the sight of one even younger than themselves placed in such an awful position. He saw they felt it; they were not old enough to disguise the fact altogether.

“Come, now, that’s over,” said he—“let’s go to the inn and have something.”

The words fell heavy and chill on the boys’ hearts; yet, perhaps, he meant no unkindness; hard man of the world as he was, perhaps even himself he felt this—he certainly saw they did, and wished to shake off the impression that had been made. Is it right to shake off such impressions so hastily? People think differently. The Curate of Sadbroke would have probably said no, but then he was peculiar in his views. He was not going to the Assize ball—he was not going out anywhere, though he had received several invitations. He was going to look for his father, to say

that he could not return with him. He must remain at Chesterton, and do what he could ; the time was very short ; he could not leave now, he hoped to see the boy as one of his flock—it was but for a little time—he must do at once all that could be done. Mr. Knightly was inclined to remonstrate. James had not recovered his strength, but he saw it would not do ; he had made up his mind to stay.

“ Can you get my church served, Mr. Saxon, if I remain over Sunday ? ” he inquired of that gentleman, who was also at Chester-ton.

“ I’ll manage that, James ; the same clergyman who has done the duty during your illness will continue it if you are not at home—do not distress yourself, but it is a grievous thing ; your father and I have already decided on going to London with a petition, as soon as we can get one signed.”

Mr. Saxon told him not to distress himself, but it was evident, notwithstanding, that he

also was deeply distressed. Yet he was going to the ball ; such things were not much in his way, but Mrs. Saxon insisted,

“It was a sacrifice,” she said, “quite a sacrifice to duty ; as for herself, she was by no means in spirits for any gaiety—in fact, never was ; but living down in the country as they did, if they did not keep up their connections a little, they should be quite shut out of society ; their eldest daughter would be introduced next year ; it was for her sake, and that of her other dear girls, that she did such things.”

And very elegant Mrs. Saxon looked, wearing the jewels bequeathed to her by her godmamma, Lady Thoroughton ; she was many years younger than her husband ; dress, manners, and appearance altogether, there was not a person more thoroughly *comme il faut* than herself. Now, had she given up society, would she have been so?—probably not. “It was a great sacrifice.” Of course, when a lady says so, it is only right to believe her. She

never went into society at all, except for the advantage of her family.

Hamilton went back to Sadborough with Mr. Knightly ; he would be obliged to leave the next morning by the coach ; it was a very short visit, but he could not resist just paying it. After they left, James turned away ; he thought he would take a little walk to try and collect his thoughts.

As he went along a side street, he saw some people running, and then a small crowd collected ; he did not trouble himself about the matter ; he did not think it was likely to be anything that concerned him, and he was passing on, when an exclamation from one of the bystanders made him look closer.

There was the figure of a girl lying on the ground, her head held in a woman's arms ; he looked closer, as he thought he recognised her. Yes, he was not mistaken—it was indeed Molly. The crowd stood back respectfully when they recognised his profession. If the

ear of the poor wandering girl was not yet quite closed to earthly sounds, it was fitting that the last words she heard should be spoken by a minister.

A way was made for him to approach. Her bonnet had fallen off; the long black hair was uncoiled, and fell in sweeping, shrouding masses over her beautiful figure. Her mouth had fallen a very little, and her eyes were closed; but the exquisitely shaped eyelids prevented that being any detraction from her beauty. There was still a colour on her cheek, though her brow was of marble paleness. Her arms were crossed on her breast, the white taper fingers of one hand contrasting strangely with the red and rough, yet kindly hand that held it, and that had been trying in vain to chafe it back to warmth and life.

“She’s dead, sir—quite dead!” said the woman, looking up to him, and then tenderly down again at the form she held in her arms;

“I’ve seen death often enough afore this—she’s gone, poor chield!—I saw her wasn’t long for this world, to-day, when she spoke; but I didn’t think ’twould a-come just like this!”

He gazed pityingly at her. Just then a man’s voice was heard outside the circle, speaking roughly.

“What’s the matter here?” said he, pushing his way through; “move on, all you, please—there’s to be no blocking up the streets to-day!”

“’Tis a girl dead,” said one of the little crowd, half angrily.

“Dead!—nonsense!—shamming, I suppose!” said he, as he pushed in. But he was a little awed when he found himself in the presence of the young clergyman, and also saw that indeed death was there of very truth. He touched his hat to James Knightly.

“I’ve orders, sir,” he said, “to allow of no

crowds in Chesterton streets to-day. Her'll be carried up to the workus to once, and then they'll do what's right. There, go along all of you—that's right!" he added, as the people moved off.

"I'll go along wi' her," said the woman, who had first spoken, again to James; "I knows the people up to the workus—they'll do what can be done; but 'tis no good, her be dead—there be no doubt o' that!"

"That be the clergyman from Sadborough," he heard her say, as he left, "who was hurt to the fire, and gived witness to-day—'twas he and this poor maid who saved one of the young chaps."

He turned sorrowfully away; he could do nothing—it was all over as regarded her in this world now. He saw the constable bustling about; the poor girl's bonnet had been tossed about unknowingly among the crowd, and now, as the man turned, his heavy foot, covered with mud and dust, crushed and trampled

the red rose into the ground. It had done its work—it would matter little to Sally now. Poor wandering child!—the thought came to his mind—what had he ever done for her?—he who had been asking God to give him work—who had been dissatisfied with the little he had to do ; and here had been work sent him, and he had not done it—he had passed by on the other side ; he had never said anything to her, any word that might do her good. Alas ! alas ! it was surely cause for self-reproach and self-abasement !—the sower was frail, and had slacked his hand, and she was gone into the presence of her God, without one word from him. Yet was it not the seed that he had sown in the first place, that, sown over again, had brought forth fruit ? He remembered her words to him the evening in Duck Lane. And where was her lot now?—would she be in the Eternal World, where Tom would be?—was she there even now, waiting to receive him ?

Her words had been true—deeply, pitiably true ; neither parson nor priest had ever helped her, and yet, verily, the young clergyman believed she would. He went on upon his way, even more sorrowful than before, thinking of her, and thinking of poor Jem. Had he done all he ought for the boy ? He was one of his own special flock ; surely if he had received better instruction, this could not have come to pass. What a fearful reflection, that such a case as this should be, as it were, the first fruits of his new school ! But it did not come from the school, it came from the previous want of teaching—it was sin ; that seed had been sown, and had, indeed, brought forth abundantly the fruit thereof. All this only proved the need there was for him to work.

But he was still very weak ; he was glad, after a little while, to return to the inn, and to get some refreshment, he really required it ; but he was again delayed on his way.

He returned, almost worn out, and kept quiet the rest of the evening. But the next morning he called on the chaplain of the gaol, and had a long talk with him respecting the wretched boy, and also obtained permission to see him. And day after day he did see him, never wearying, never shrinking from the task he had set himself. If he had neglected any in the time past, there was more abundant reason why he should work and pray, labour and strive, in the present, even while it was called to-day.

Great interest was made to save the life of the unhappy boy. Mr. Saxon and Mr. Knightly spared no trouble nor pains in their endeavours. A petition was quickly signed, headed by Messrs. Gain and Twine as the chief losers, and signed by all the most influential and respectable names in the town. There was the greatest feeling excited in the place and neighbourhood. They went to town, as they said they should do, and re-

quested an interview with the Secretary of State. It was granted at once ; the petition was looked over most carefully, every plea was attended to, every extenuating circumstance that was related listened to calmly and quietly—so calmly, so quietly, that they soon saw there was no hope. They received but the one answer : “ The country required it ! ” Perhaps it did—those who said it most certainly considered it did. But, happily, the country does not require it now, except in the one case where God’s law requires it also—“ Who-so sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed ! ”





CHAPTER XVII.

THE RETURN HOME.

IT was said that James Knightly, when returning from his short walk after leaving the scene of the death of the Irish girl, met with another delay. As he was going down a quiet street that led to the inn, he saw the figure of a boy sitting on a door-step. The figure attracted his notice, even tired and sad as he was; it seemed that of one sitting down thoroughly miserable and worn out. As he came near the boy lifted his head, starting at the sound of a footstep, and he then saw it was Jack Martin. It was a weary face that met the eye of the Curate of Sadbrooke—a

face that just glanced up, and, meeting his, was then immediately bent down again, as though with a hope that it had not been recognized. He went up to the step, and put his hand on the boy's shoulder. The sobs that had hitherto been suppressed now burst forth.

“What are you doing here by yourself, Jack?” he inquired.

“Waiting for father; he be gone to fetch the cart; we be going home to once, then.”

“It's a great mercy to see you here, Jack,” said the clergyman. “I'm truly thankful on your account!”

“I didn't do it, sir,” said the boy, driving back the sobs, and looking him straight in the face.

He did not object to the answer; it was the sturdy feeling that he had not done the act, and that, therefore, his acquittal was only his right; and it was a feeling that, although somewhat roughly expressed, his auditor respected.

“I know you did not, Jack,” he replied; “I never myself thought you had, and, as far as this particular crime was concerned, you were entitled to the acquittal you met with; but, oh! my boy, consider how nearly you went into the sin, how close you went to the edge of the precipice, how you tempted God to give you up, how near you drew to Satan and how near he drew to you, and then ask yourself whether it was not God’s mercy that kept you back, and also His great mercy that made those who had to try the case take the view of it they did, when things were looking so dark, so terribly dark around you.”

He had asserted his innocence, but he could not stand up against such talking as that.

“I knows it all, sir,” he replied; “Tom were always a-talking to me, but I never minded he—I never minded no one, and now no one will ever care as to what comes to me again.”

“They have cared for you, or you would

not be free as you now are. I hope you will find Tom better."

Jack could not reply to this, but presently he looked up and said,

"You don't think they'll do it to him, do'ee, sir?"

"Do what?"

His thoughts had not gone on with the boy's, who could not put his question into plainer words.

"Jem," he murmured, shivering, and looking down again.

"I fear there is very little hope—no hope, I may say. There is, alas! no doubt as to his guilt; I am going to remain here, to see him, if possible; and, oh! Jack, you, who so nearly went on to the same guilt, who have so narrowly escaped the same fate, pray that he may be fitted for the change, ere it be too late."

Jack was terribly overcome; the curate had intended to tell him of Molly's death, but it would not do now, it was only right that he

should feel as he did ; but he had quite enough to distress him at present—he would hear that another time.

Job came up at this moment with the cart. James shook hands with him.

“ I’m truly thankful, Job,” he said, “ you have Jack to take home with you. What a comfort it will be to his mother to see him again !”

“ He didn’t a-do it, sir,” said the man sturdily, “ though ’tis none the less a mercy his being safe, and I’m thankful, God knows ; he went too far—a deal too far, but he didn’t a-do it—right’s right ; I trust it will be a lesson for he all his life through.”

“ I trust indeed it will, Job ; and, oh ! think of that unhappy boy over there,” and he pointed in the direction of the prison ; “ and when you thank God this night, as I know you will, for the great mercy he has vouchsafed to you, do not forget to ask that a blessing from Him may light down even on that dark place.”

“Then you don’t think, sir, as there’s any hope?”

“I believe not—I think not; but, Jack looks faint—have you had anything to eat?”

“I don’t want anything, thank’ee, sir,” said Jack, and his father said the same, but he had tasted nothing since the morning, when he had left home, and then could scarcely touch the breakfast that Nanny had put before him.

But neither Jack nor himself was much inclined for food, and, besides, they did not like the idea of going into any public-house.

“You cannot go that long drive without food,” said James. “I will go with you, and get you something.”

He walked by the side of the cart, leading them out of the town, which he knew well, down the most unfrequented streets, and then stopping at a small inn that appeared quiet,

sent them out some refreshment, and remained till they had left, that, in case they were recognised, his presence might in some measure save them from annoyance. They went on ; when they were a little way out of the town, Job drew up, and said—

“ I’m waiting to look out for that there maid ; I reckon her’ll be coming down our way, and I’d like to help her on.”

“ Her said her was ill,” replied Jack ; “ I’ve heerd mother say so often ; but her never looked so—not that I saw.”

“ Mother would take her in, I reckon,” said his father, “ if we could only just get a sight of her. Her wants a bit o’ nursing—that’s it. Her could get a bit o’ braiding, enough to keep herself, and ’twould set her up again, I’m thinking.”

They were not afraid of adding another to their large family. It is often so, where there are so many, one more is little thought of ; it is the comfortable couple, who, without a child

to interfere with them, or an anxiety in the world, often sit over the fire with their cat, unwilling to assist or to do anything, even for their nearest relatives.

They waited, looking about for some little time, but saw nothing of the girl.

“Where can her be, I wonder?” said Jack; “her wouldn’t stop there.”

No, she was not there; she needed no earthly home now, nothing but that which the work-house authorities would not grudge—the little spot of earth that would cover that fair form from sight; they would grant that, it would be the last expense she would ever be to them; she needed nothing more of any upon earth.

They went on over the cold downs. Jack recovered his spirits in some measure in the fresh evening air, and asked his father many questions about Tom and home.

“Tom had been worse since his absence; but that morning he had appeared brighter,” Job thought. “They should soon see him

again, now ; and mother would be main glad—her must have been terrible anxious, sure !” and Job whipped on the old pony at the thought.

It was night long before they reached SADBorough ; they went round to the little inn with the cart. The ostler came out.

“ So you’ve a-got your boy back again, maister,” said he, shaking hands with them both. “ You’d better come in and have a glass of summut ; they’s up still, and will be all downright glad to see ’ee. ’Tis a good job, sure, things have gone right.”

Job declined going in ; but the master of the inn came out to welcome him, and this made a short delay—but they went on as quickly as possible through the streets.

How different Jack felt now, to what he did that miserable time, when he last traversed them in the custody of the constables before being taken to Chesterton ! He could scarcely understand that he was free—he was still

ready to start at any sound ; but he was so happy ! only the thought of that miserable boy at Chesterton would intrude, and then his step was heavier than before.

They turned out of Fivefinger Street, up into the well-remembered little lane—the lane that his thoughts had so often reverted to when in the prison at Chesterton. It seemed so much smaller than it used to be, yet it certainly was the same place. Yes ; there was the cottage—a light burning in the window.

Nanny heard the steps—she had been listening with such intense anxiety ! She was sure it was two people—but might it not be someone else ? No, she was sure it was Jack, quite sure ! She could not go to the door—she tried, but failed in the effort ; she sank back in her chair, gasping for breath !

The door opened.

“ Mother ! ” she heard spoken.

Jack was in the house—safe again in the

little cottage, his arm hanging round her neck, his lips pressing hers, and poor Nanny, for the first time in her life, went off into a wild burst of hysterics.

Job sat down, folded his arms on the table, and laid his head on them. The thought came to him, what would have become of him if he had had to come home without the boy? He couldn't have a-done it—he knowed he couldn't; mother would look up agen soon now, her never wouldn't then.

After a while Nanny recovered in some degree.

“How's Tom, mother?” asked Jack.

“Oh! terrible weak, Jack,” she replied; “we've hardly known how to keep life in him all day. But I don't know however I could ha' lived through it, if it hadn't been for the having he to care for—I couldn't ha' borne it without that. Oh! Jack, never bring us to such trouble again!”

Jack kissed her again—it was his only reply.

“Miss Maude have been here twice to-day,” she continued, “and stop’t a long time with Tom. ’Twas a great comfort to he; he only prayed, Jack, that he might know you was comed home—that were all. He don’t want to live no longer, now. But, oh! Jack, Jack, how he have a-thought of you! ’Twas a great comfort to I, Miss Maude’s coming. I don’t know what I should ha’ done without she.”

“There’s One will bless her for it, and Parson Knightly, too,” said Job, for the first time lifting his head off the table; “and that there poor maid—we stop’t for her coming along, but couldn’t see nought of her.”

“I wish you’d a-brought Molly home; Tom would have liked so to see her,” said Nanny.

“Oh! wherever be Molly?” said Sall, who had been endeavouring to get some share of Jack’s attention; but he could hardly yet leave his mother.

“ We’ll look arter her to-morrow,” said Nanny.

“ I must go up to Tom, mother,” said Jack.

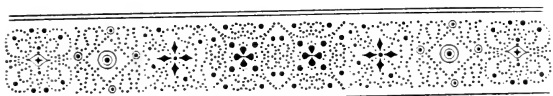
“ Mind you goes very quiet, then,” she said. “ Mr. Mills says as he may go off any time now. Here, stop till I get a candle; and go up very soft. Don’t ’ee make no noise.”

There was no need to tell Jack to be quiet now, the only fear was that the over-wrought nerves might break down completely; but he put what strain he could on himself.

He went up, springing up the stairs noiselessly two steps at a time, his mother following slowly with a candle. The door was ajar, and the little room looking just as usual. The moon and stars were shining in through the lattice—it was all very still! He thought Tom must have fallen asleep; he hoped he had. He would just look at him then, without waking him. He stole very softly round to the other side of the bed; the light of the

candle, with which his mother was following, came in through the open door. He lifted down the clothes carefully with his hand—the face was turned a little on one side. He bent over to look at it, then a wild startled wail burst from the boy's lips. There was only a rifled casket lying there—another gem was set in the Eternal Crown !





CHAPTER XVIII.

OVER!

“IT was over,” said the good people of Chesterton and Sadborough, and they were very glad. That poor boy’s fate had been hanging over them like a cloud, distressing them like a nightmare. It had prevented their enjoying any pleasure, or entering into anything with comfort or with spirit; but now they could feel quite happy again—it was such a relief it was over and they were very glad!

And what was over?—and why were they very glad?

The life had passed away from their ken ; and that was all, for it was not over.

How strange that people who read their Bible, and believe it to be a revelation from the Eternal God, should talk in such a manner as this ! And yet, is it not common parlance ?

But is it over ? Has the thing, that has been, ever an end ? Do the words once spoken, go on reverberating in the air throughout all time ? Does the deed once perpetrated become photographed, to rise up again a witness at the judgment ? This may be a truth of science, or it may be an imagination. But, in one sense, it is, indeed, true.

The word that has been spoken arose from some other word ; it will be the cause of many more ; the responsibility of it endureth for ever. The act that has been committed was caused by something that went before ; it will be the cause of countless others that must follow after.

Has there ever been a first since the beginning? Shall a requiem ever be sung over the last? The thing that has once had a being, shall it ever have altogether an end?

These are hard questions—they lead out into the deep waters. But could we once lift the veil that hides the present world from the Eternal, we should never again say of any departed life—"it is over."

The phase of existence that was before us, has passed away^a; the shortest, the most insignificant, except from its after consequences, has merged into another, and that is all.

Thus much has been revealed to us. But if we place between time and eternity a curtain of our own making—a veil, growing thicker and thicker every day with our own sin, and, looking at that in preference to the thing which has been revealed, say we cannot see, surely in this matter our sin remaineth!

Oh! the doubt and the disbelief in every heart, coming to light constantly by words

like these ! the distrust, the unbelief, that sin that doth so easily beset us, how are we holden by it ! If it were not so, there never could be springing around us the crop that is, even now, thriving and flourishing of infidelity, and despair. The life has entered within the veil, but it is not over.

“It is over,” said the sinner, and he went back to his old sin ; “life is but for a little while, and death, come when it may, is but a matter of a few minutes’ suffering—it is soon past, and then it is over.”

Nay, but it is not over. Even to thyself the scene at which thou hast been present is not over—it is only a link in the chain of circumstances of thy life, which it is thine to use, which, according to the use thou makest of each, will be a cable to draw thee up to heaven, or one that will drag thee down for ever into hell. The time will come when thou wilt believe all this, and when, either for weal or for woe, let others say in their ignorance

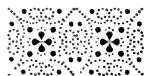
as they will, thou wilt know for thine ownself—it is not over !

“It is over !” said the many who came to gaze, as at a show, or at a spectacle—the more exciting because the more fearful, in its intense reality. “Let us eat, drink, and be merry !” Nay, it is not over ! The punishment decreed by the earthly judge has been carried out, but the fiat of the Eternal is not heard upon earth. The seen passeth away—it endureth only for a little while ; but the unseen is the reality. There is a change as to the outward form, for the Material is the Variable. We see it in the things that are around us—they are for ever changing, and for ever re-forming ; the things that our own fingers have made, after awhile crumble away and become dust. But the great forces of Nature are imperishable. The Finite is the tangible—it endureth for a little while ; the Infinite is intangible, and abideth. Man may destroy the body, but the spark of life, that

which we cannot see, which we cannot understand, it is not his to touch ; it is gone home, to the home for which it was preparing here ; and not only of that home, but of the beings who are to inhabit it, may we say—“The things which are seen are temporal, the things which are not seen are eternal !”

It is the same in all cases. The mourner watching by the bed, it may be of childhood, of youth, manhood, or worn out old age, turns away, saying, “It is over !” The passer-by sees an accident, by which one or many souls are hurried into eternity, and he says, as the last spark of earthly life leaves his presence, with a sigh of relief, “It is over !” The miserable beings who find their delight in witnessing the sufferings of their fellow-men, attend at the saddest sight of all sights, and then go back to their occupations, their farm, and their merchandise, their eating and their drinking, their sin and their iniquity, and say, “It is over !” To each, to

all, to the heartless gazer, or the broken-hearted friend, to the watcher of the change, come as it may, in youth or in age, in honour or dishonour, in poverty or wealth, to sinner or to saint, who, turning away as the spirit parts, say, "It is over!" let the answer be given, trumpet-tongued, if it may be so—
"FRIEND, IT IS NOT OVER—IT HAS NOT LONG BEGUN!"





CHAPTER XIX.

STRUGGLES TOWARDS LIGHT.

WE must all bear the consequences of our own acts—well for us in some measure that it should be so, or we should sin with too high a hand. It was long, very long before Jack Martin could in any way get over the remembrance that his brother had died without seeing him, that he had not received those parting words which are so dear to those who are left behind. Often, when he was at work, would the recollection come to him of how poor Tom's last days had been embittered by anxiety respecting him; often would Tom's sad weary face seem as it were visible

to him. He thought of him lying on his bed of death—waiting hour after hour of that weary day for the step that he was so longing to hear, watching through the daylight till it faded away into the evening; hoping through the twilight hours, till they also passed away into the night, the death agony increased tenfold by the agony of mind as to what was his brother's fate. Had he heard him come in?—he was always asking himself the question. It was Jack's hope, more than hope; as he thought about it, it became his full belief that he had done so. His mother told him over and over how Tom had prayed for it, and the boy believed the prayer had not been unanswered; yes, Tom had surely been granted that for which he had asked so earnestly. It was on him that the sorrow had alighted, and he deserved it—fully, entirely deserved it!

The thought that at the sound of his step entering his home, the parting spirit had taken

flight, without giving him one word, was a very sad one, and he felt it grievously. Then he heard of Molly's death; he had always thought her very lovely, though he kept a good deal out of her way, because he felt sure she did not like his going about with her father and Jem Brown so much as he did; but now to hear that she had gone to Chester-ton, so ill as she was, to save him, woke up a strange feeling in his heart; and then Sally told him the message she had left with Tom, and Jack did wonder, as he looked up at the evening sky, whether it ever would be so!

And Jem!—poor Jem!—this was a thought from which he could derive no comfort. Perhaps, had he spoken to him, had he been firmer, more determined, Jem might have turned back too; but what was the use of thinking over the past?—he had not remonstrated with him, he had not striven to save him; it was no use looking back—it was too

late!—too late! But, oh! what a bitter reflection!—what a miserable past it was!

The first few days after his return, he would sit moodily over the fire, scarce moving, doing nothing, and apparently caring for nothing, till Nanny became quite anxious about what she called his queer ways.

After Tom's funeral, he got work, or, rather, his father got it for him, and he went to it mechanically. He planted the potatoes, or drove the plough, as he used to do; he went out to it in the morning, and came home at night, when it was over; but it was a dull, joyless routine.

One day a boy at the farm, Bill Sykes by name, refused to lend him a knife, as they sat together under a hedge, eating their dinners, and moved further off, saying—

“He'd never been used to keep company with they as had been in gaol,” and added, “the doctor's boy said so, too.”

Jack did not reply; his spirit was much

broken since the day when he had had his encounter with him and his buttons. He went back to his work, but as he returned home, met the young individual whose opinion was considered by Bill of such consequence. He had on a new jacket, and was strutting on, high in professional dignity, delivering his medicines out of a still handsomer basket than that which had been sent at Jack's head, the present one being covered with shining black oilskin. He passed without noticing Jack in the least, holding his head high in the air, and looking very grand; and the boy very nearly that evening left SADBROOKE for ever! But he must go once again to see Tom's grave—he could not leave without doing that, so he stayed just for one day, as he thought; but the next afternoon, as he came out of a field that led into the high road, it so happened that he came upon the curate, who was returning from SADBROOKE. He saw the boy at once, and before Jack was hardly aware

of what he was doing, he found himself shaking hands with Mr. Knightly, and then walking on by his side.

Notwithstanding his sadness and low spirits, and an idea that had come upon him, that he cared for nothing, he certainly did throw many furtive glances around to see whether Bill Sykes might not be somewhere behind the hedge, to observe the honour that was being done him. But there was neither Bill Sykes nor the doctor's boy in sight, nor, indeed, any one of his acquaintance; for if ever it does happen to any of us to wish our friends might be at hand to see any unexpected attention or respect that is being shown to us, it invariably happens that they are not in the way just at the right time, and so it was now for Jack.

“Did you see Tom before his death?” asked the clergyman.

Jack forgot all his grandeur at this question.

“No, I didn’t,” he replied, shortly, almost rudely.

His companion was sorry he had asked the question, it was evidently a very bitter grief.

“I am truly sorry, Jack, for you, that it was so,” he said; “but, you know, Tom has found a better home; you would not wish to have detained him in suffering here—you must look to meeting him again! Don’t think too much of the past, except to take warning by it; but look forward, and look upward—there is the same blessing for you that he found, if you only seek it!”

“Tom never did no wrong!”

“Not in the same way that you did, certainly; but it was not his goodness that took him to heaven, and it is not your sin that need shut you out. ‘Seek ye the Lord while he may be found.’ He will be found of you now, if you seek him, Jack.”

The message left him by Molly came to his mind; death had been brought so near him,

that that, together with his own peculiar situation, made him feel, just then, to wish he also was out of life. But the feeling proceeded in great measure from dissatisfaction with everything around him, so he was ready with an excuse.

“I don’t know how—that is not exactly.”

“I want to tell you of poor Jem,” continued James, not noticing the interruption. “Oh! Jack, that poor boy knew very little, as far as head knowledge went, but when he desired mercy of God, he found the way to ask for it, and I believe, verily believe, the mercy came!”

“I wanted to know about he, sir, that I did!” said Jack, his thoughts quite turned from his own unhappiness.

“He was truly, deeply penitent, Jack; he confessed his crime, and stated your innocence of any participation in it, most emphatically. He said you had endeavoured to turn him away, but that he persisted in going on.”

“ I didn’t try—I didn’t say nothing scarce—I can’t bear to think of it !” he replied, earnestly.

“ We none of us try to do good to others as we ought—we none of us resist sin, or strive against it, either in our own hearts, or in the world, as it is our duty to do; and the remembrance of our neglect comes upon us often very bitterly, when it is too late. It is right it should be so. I should not like to think you had forgotten all the suffering you have gone through ; it would give very little promise of a better future.”

“ I will do better, sir ; but however can I, after what’s a-gone by ? No one won’t speak to me, and the boys will scarce work with me, because I’ve been in gaol.”

“ It is a trial, Jack, a great trial ; but you have brought it upon yourself, and it is not heavier than you can bear, if you ask God to enable you to do so ; and it is according as you bear and endure this, that is come upon

you as the consequence of your own wrong-doing, that you will prove whether or not you are sincere in your determination of acting differently for the future."

"What good ever can I do now, sir? They all say as I'm bad!"

"Their saying it does not make you so; and you have a great deal that you can do. Your poor father and mother have suffered sadly on your account; it is now your bounden duty to shew them that you intend to be a dutiful son, and to help them as much as you can."

"I won't go away, then; I'll stop and try," he replied, determinedly.

"Why, where were you going to?"

"I dunno—I couldn't bear it!"

"Pray to God to teach you to bear it, to teach you how to act, how to live, how to spend your future life to His service. If you ask earnestly, He will teach you; you do know how to seek him, Jack—you could not

have been so much with Tom without knowing. But say no more of leaving home," he continued, gravely ; "it would be acting the part of a coward to run away now !"

"Nobody hadn't spoke kind to me then ; I'll stop now."

"I'm going to have a class of boys twice a week of an evening after work in Sadborough school-room. I hope you will come."

"I should like it, sir," said he ; but then he looked down, and added falteringly, "perhaps the rest won't like as I should come."

"They'll like what I like, if they come at all," was the quiet reply ; "but you must expect to meet with some slights, and must learn to stand them, or I shall have very little hope of you, Jack."

They parted, and the boy went home quite a different being. It had been a very happy meeting for him ; the parson did not despise him as Bill Sykes did. He thought there was hope for him yet, though he had been in gaol.

Nanny wondered what had come to him; instead of the sullen, wretched manner in which he had spoken for some days previously, he was now active and pleasant; and when a return of the old feeling came upon him, as it often would, he did his best to shake it off. When she heard he had met Mr. Knightly, and had promised him to go to his class, she knew at once where the good influence had come from.

He was a good deal shunned by the boys at first, and had to bear with many annoyances, but he never complained; he saw it was the punishment that had come on him, and that it was for him to take it patiently; and he strove earnestly, and prayed earnestly that he might do so.

James Knightly saw all this, but never interfered, as long as they were quiet before him. He saw Jack was learning to stand alone, and that was what he wished to bring him to. It was little use, he always told them all, to

attempt to help those who were not willing to help themselves. But the boy worked very hard, and made great progress. His thoughts did not ramble to other things so much as did those of the others; play for him seemed a thing gone by for ever.

It was his great pleasure to go to SADBROOKE church, for he revered and loved the curate as one almost too good for earth. Yet it was uphill work for a long time, and none but himself knew all his trials and difficulties. He seemed constantly beaten back whenever he thought he had made a little progress, but slow as the work was, little by little, step by step, way was made.

He was very useful at home, very gentle now to his mother, very industrious at his work on the farm, and he got on very well at school. He could soon read and write well; surpassing the others, as his thoughts were so much more centred on what he undertook than were theirs.

The evenings that he spent at home, the memory of Tom was ever with him. He thought he was doing what would please Tom, if he still knew what was going on upon earth.

He had received a terrible shock—one that could not pass by without leaving some result, either for evil or for good ; and surely it was not chance, but God's mercy, that sent him across the field that night, just as James Knightly was passing. It was the turning-point of his life. The heavy weight, too, that had oppressed his spirits respecting poor Jem, was greatly lightened. Mr. Knightly had been with him, had stood by him to the last, had spoken hopefully of him, and the burden of this bitter remembrance was greatly lifted off Jack's mind.

Poor Jem ! he had indeed confessed all ; and, strange as it might seem, Hamilton had been perfectly right in stating his conviction, that, notwithstanding the evidence to the con-

trary, the fire had first taken effect on the inside of the building.

The boy said he had thrown a lighted match through a crack in the shutter, and had watched it ignite, playing and toying, as it were, with the things inside, before he put the light into the thatch.

And what had been the motive that had been the inducement to such an act?

Truly, little enough ; evil seed, the seed of discontent and ill-feeling, had been sown in ground ready to receive it—ready, because of emptiness of better things, because so utterly lying fallow, so entirely uncultivated.

He had been out of work, and had applied for it to Mr. Gain ; he had been refused with hard words, and told he was a lazy, good-for-nothing boy, and sent off. He was very angry, and repeated the words to his mother's lodger ; the man took advantage of them, wishing to make him useful to himself, and kept up his anger by a taunting speech. He went

to the “Wolf’s Arms,” and heard what was said there ; he had not the sense to see the folly, the mischief of it all.

He had left school, where he might have learnt better things. He forsook the good that was offered to him, he chose the evil in preference, and the good had departed from him.

But the sin met with its punishment. The most ignorant, the weakest, are ever at such times the victims. Well was it then that all forsook him not—that there was one with him, even then, to point to hope, and to say of Him whose death was a world’s life—“This man receiveth sinners.”





CHAPTER XX.

THE CURATE'S SERMON.

THERE was great joy felt at Sadbrooke when the curate went among his people. The first place he went to was the school, where he was received in a manner very different to that day, when, not more than three months previously, he had opened it. But the boys were now very grave and quiet; it was awful to them to see him, knowing where he had so lately been. And he was grave too, and looking ill.

The school was getting into excellent order; the master gave a very favourable report, and the curate saw plainly that if the expense of

the school would require some self-denial on his part, it would be abundantly repaid by the good that was undoubtedly being done. Deeply thankful was he now, that he had been led to think so earnestly of it—and not only to think, but that the work had actually been begun, before the late event had forced more deeply on his mind the necessity of instructing the children of the poor in the neighbourhood.

The thing once begun, was not likely to come to an end. It was a small thing certainly, but it might be productive of great blessing.

He saw many of the people, but there was one visit to be paid that he shrunk from terribly. His own nerves had been shaken, first by illness, and then by the sad scene at which he had been present; and he would willingly have delayed it, could he have thought it right to do so. But it was not right to delay, and he determined to carry it out at once. It was the visit to Widow Brown.

He had seen the last of her unhappy son, he had his last message to give, and he must not shrink from his task.

He found her sitting with her hands before her over the fire, doing nothing. There was almost a vacant look on her face, as he came in. She did not speak to him, or look at him after the first glance.

He sat down by her and spoke. After a little while tears, the first she had shed since, fell from her eyes—then heavier and heavier, a perfect rain. His heart ached for her, there was so little he could do for her—nothing, it seemed to him. But she did not think so; for weeks she would see no one else, or, if any others did come into the cottage, never took any notice, or answered anything they said. But he had been good to her boy, had tried to save him, to instruct him, had come to the cottage after him, had stood by him all through, and she would sit and listen to his words with the greatest reverence and atten-

tion, and wait for his visit, as the one event of the day. For he never forgot it, never neglected it; he had promised Jem, and he was not one to forget such a promise as that.

She was quite incapable of work now, and yet it was very plain that, for a person of her active habits, the only thing to restore her would be to rouse her in some way from her present state of inactivity.

Her daughter in America was written to, and answered immediately, saying that her husband and herself would willingly receive her mother, they were doing very well, and had a large family; she wanted assistance, which it was difficult to procure, and her mother would be of real use. This was the first ray of hope for the unhappy woman; she was not one who could bear to be altogether dependant, and she longed to leave the place where she had seen such sorrow. A subscription was made for her, quite sufficient to defray the expense of

her voyage, and procure her all necessary comforts. After her arrival, James Knightly received from her a letter, written in a more comfortable strain than he had dared to hope, calling down blessings on him for his goodness to her boy, and imploring his prayers for herself, that she might for the future lead a new life.

The cottage at Sadbrooke remained empty—no one cared to take it again; when the bridge was rebuilt it was pulled down to widen the turn of the road, and few people now remember that there was ever a house there.

The church was thronged the first Sunday after the curate's return; he had not preached since his accident on the day of the riot, and he was welcomed with every demonstration of affection.

He spoke a little of the sad end of one who had been so lately among them, and then went on with his subject—the standing in the battle on the side of the Lord.

“There may seem to be many opinions in the world,” he said—“there are churches and chapels, church people and dissenters; but these are only outward differences; amid all these seeming diversities—there are in reality only two ways: the downward road, that leadeth unto death—the upward, that leadeth to eternal life.

“There are but two parties in the world—the followers of the Prince of Darkness, the servants of the Lord of Life. Amid all the struggles that go on around us, there is but one that is of any real consequence. And which side is each of you taking in this struggle? The battle is the Lord’s; He will, He must be the Conqueror in the end; the one party is losing every day, for a soul once lost to Satan is lost for ever. The other is ever gaining, for a soul once won to Christ, is won for ever. But why halt ye so long between two opinions? think ye that the battle cannot be fought without ye? Verily

it can, and it will. But are ye of those who think that there is time enough? Dare ye to stand up before God this day in His own house and say unto Him, ‘ We are fighting against Thee in the great battle ; we are doing the work of the evil one—we are aiding him in every act and every word ; but we intend to turn ere the time of destruction comes ; in the day that Thou winnest the victory, we will enter in among them that take the spoil.’

“ Brethern, I limit not the mercy of the Eternal—higher than Heaven, what can we we know?—but again I ask you if ye will dare such a fearful risk? The struggle is going on even now around you, and within you ; the Lord musters His hosts for the battle, and once more I put the question this day : ‘ Who is on the Lord’s side?—who?’ ”

The full deep musical voice had been kept very low, though each word was distinctly heard to the very end of the church, and

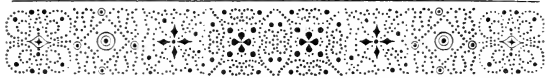
would have been so in one considerably larger ; but the last words were spoken aloud like a trumpet call.

Cecil, who was present, having come home for the Easter holidays, said he thought the people would have risen in reply. Such things have been before now, but that has been when the preaching was on the lonely hillside, and the only canopy the blue vault of heaven—when, in troublous times, the struggle has been one more manifest in outward form. Such demonstrations do not take place in our day, and in our church, neither are they needed. The Curate of Sadbroke was not a man who would have desired or encouraged such things. What he sought was the real true dedication of the life, not the excited action of a moment.

That day was the turning-point in Cecil's life ; he did not talk after that of preaching to be admired, but it settled him in his determination as to his future profession. There was another on whom it had the same effect.

Jack Martin was there, and heard that sermon, and often said it decided his future course, though he did not think at the time what it would be, but he then determined to put his hand to the work, from which he never after turned back.





CHAPTER XXI.

HAPPY DAYS.

THE spring, that had been so melancholy a one for the dwellers at Sadbrooke, had past away, and the summer sun shone brightly on all around. It seemed to bring renewed gladness and happiness with its beams. In due course it brought the merry month of June, when the blackbird sung his merriest tune; and then there appeared the following notice in the county paper :

“ At Sadborough, on the 20th inst., by the Reverend Edward Saxon, Rector, Tristram Mills, Esq., surgeon of Sadborough, to Bertha,

eldest daughter of Charles Gain, Esq., of Woody Knoll."

The presence of a pretty amiable young lady and her snug little fortune added greatly to the comfort of Mr. Mills, a thing that he by no means disregarded. He professed himself devotedly attached to "my wife," as he always called her—perhaps, after the affair of the riots, he thought it necessary to say a good deal about his devotion. It was rather noisy love-making, but that suited him, and as it continued after their marriage, it made people believe in its fervour immensely. But he would make her an excellent husband, there was no doubt of that; be very kind to her, nurse her tenderly if she were ill, and if she were to die!—well, Mr. Mills would never break his heart for Bertha! But there was no reason why she should die—most certainly Mr. Mills did not wish she should, so we will hope she is alive still. His business increased every year, and so did his family. And a

very happy couple they were—very noisy and happy indeed.

And now to go into Duck Lane. Better times had dawned upon the Martins; they were much more prosperous. Job was recovered, and again at work, as was also Jack; the expense and drag of poor Tom's illness was gone; they had found true friends in the Knightlys, and altogether the little cottage looked pleasanter and brighter than it perhaps had ever done before.

Sally was now kitchen-maid at Fairleigh, and gave her mother such wonderful accounts of what gentlefolks required for breakfast and dinner, as seemed to her almost like a fabulous report.

At Fairleigh, also, there was now much happiness. James was recovering health and strength rapidly, though quite contrary to the doctor's prognostications, who said he would be ill again if he exerted himself so much; but work to some natures is far greater rest than

idleness, and it was so to him. Besides, he was realising the truth of the lines—

“ A merry heart goes all the day,
A sad one tires in a mile-a.”

He felt he was equal to doing any amount of work now.

The school at Sadbroke was a decided success; no less so was the evening class at Sadbrough. The boys had sense and intellect, though they were poor, and to allow this to run waste was the sure way for an evil crop to spring up within their hearts; to sow the good seed was the first step towards its springing up and bearing fruit.

During the summer the Curate of Sadbroke was appointed evening lecturer at Sadbrough. Mr. Saxon at first was afraid he was attempting too much, and expected to see some of his early efforts fall to the ground, but they did not; he never gave up an old thing that was good because he had undertaken something new, and when, at the year's end, he received

a handsome purse of money for his services, he found the school had been in that way no drag to him at all, and there was very little chance that it would ever again fall to the ground. There was of course now greater intimacy than ever between the families at Fairleigh and the Grange.

As the summer evenings came on, Alice and Maude would often stroll out together for a walk; they had so much that was interesting to both to talk about, and Alice would not be much longer at Sadborough. There was her *trousseau*, and the bridesmaid's dresses, and many like weighty matters to be arranged; and the girls had each her own happy future to look forward to, and it drew them very much together.

It was a very favourite walk of theirs to go through the poplar avenue to the convent, and to wander up and down by the river side; and oftentimes, of course quite unexpectedly, they would be joined by James, who was returning

that way from Sadbroke. But somehow it happened that if, instead of strolling through the poplar avenue, they went up the road, or down the road, or over the bridge, or even in any new direction, whichever way they might go, their walk was always attended with the same result—it was very odd ; they could not think how it was they had met again, but so it was—such things do happen accidentally every day. Occasionally they would go to overlook the girls' work, or to visit at some of the cottages—altogether it was a very happy summer.

One afternoon, as James came out of the school, he encountered Farmer Stuart ; his landlord was building him another house, and till it was finished he had taken a small one in the village ; but the farm buildings were up, and work was going on again the same as usual.

“ A fine evening, farmer,” said the curate.

“ Yes, sir, not much to find fault of now. I was rayther a-wishing to see of you.”

“Were you?—what about?”

“Why, Maister Knightly, there was once as I said ‘No’ to you about thick school, when you axed me to give ‘ee summut to it; and I said then, maybe you mind, thee’d better keep the larning to theeself, and not come arter the boys, who wanted to know no more than how to rub down a horse, or plough a straight furrow.”

“I think I remember something of the sort,” said James, laughing.

“Well, I’m not so sure as I was altogether right; not that I’m for too much o’ that sort o’ thing now, but I think as you’s reasonable like, and I don’t see as the boys is much worse than they was afore—boys always is plagues!”

“I was in hopes you were going to tell me they were better, though.”

“I’m not one as expects much, but they’s no worse, and that’s a great thing, considering—wonderful, I thinks; and the other day

Jack Martin went wi' I to market wi' a drove o' pigs, and, when I sold 'em, 'twas a long time ere I could reckon up the money right, and he told it off in a minute. So says I to my missus, when I comed home: 'If you's not above doing it, I'd like our Bill to go to thick school, or they boys at the plough will be thinking themselves above he in no time!'"

"I hope you will send him; I am sure it will be a good thing for him!"

"Why, you see, I've a-been put out wi' the loss o' they stacks, or I'd have a-gied 'ee something to the school, but next year I'll do it; so I hopes—that is, my missus do—that you'll give Bill a bit o' a preference like!"

"I should be doing him a great deal of harm if I did. If a boy is set up as a favourite by the master, he is sure to lead a pretty life by the other boys; and it is not right in any way, either; but I always tell the master to look after the new boys, and

then they soon get into their places ; and I have no doubt but he'll do very well, and soon get on. I shall look after him—I look after them all !”

“ Well, I reckon he'll come. You see things be different now to Sadbroke to what they was in parson Grey's time ; he used to let fly at a'most everyone ; he and Mr. Marks couldn't even speak, and he was always a-grumbling wi' the people for going down to the brick chapel ; and though I never goes myself, the maids seem to like it, and why for shouldn't they, as I used to tell him ? And then he was up in a minute, a-grumbling at me ; and I don't think, Mr. Knightly,” continued the farmer, capping, as it were, all the faults of the gentleman in question, “ as he could ha' rode my old mare ; he'd a-got up the wrong side, for sartain !”

“ I don't think, farmer, any good ever comes of scolding people.”

“ I've never heerd you scold, parson

Knightly, in church or out, that I will say for 'ee—you does the work yourself, and tells others the way ; but as for they as does nothing themselves, and finds fault wi' all the rest, I don't think much of 'em ; 'twouldn't do if I was to go on so on my farm."

"I always heard Mr. Grey was a very good man, Farmer Stuart," said the curate, standing up, as was fitting, for one of his order.

"Well, I hopes he be, and that he's better off now than he was wi' us, as we be better off without he, and no mistake. In his last sermon, which my missus heerd, for I was catched off to sleep, begging your pardon for saying so, he told us as he was looking for a place where there weren't no sin o' schism, as he calls it ; though, from what I heard from a friend, as came t'other day from they parts as he went to, he's a looking out still ; and he will for a bit, I reckon—folks don't like being a-droved."

"It is far easier, you know, to lead than

to drive. I daresay you find it so," replied James.

"I may drive a bit sometimes, as you call it," replied the farmer with a smile; "but I don't know that it do answer, if it's too hard either wi' the men or the 'osses—and, talking of 'osses, that black 'un of your'n is a down-right beauty, Mr. Knightly; and how he do go when you drive him—just like a lamb! I watched you a-bring him up over the bridge one day, and 'twas a rale pleasure to look at him."

"He's a fine horse, and will be a very good one, only he wants careful driving just at present."

"There be the young ladies a-coming," said the farmer, who saw his companion just then turn round, "so I'll say good arternoon, and not a-keep 'ee no longer."

He watched the young man walk quickly down the hill.

"There he goes arter his sweetheart," said

he to himself ; “ just as I used to go gallivanting arter my missus, when I were young. Young folks be all on ’em much alike, though I will say for he, as he works hard enough ; and ’tis different enough, sure, now to what things were in Parson Grey’s time.”

With which thought uppermost in his mind, he went home and told his wife—Bill were to go to school, and the parson had promised to make a scholar of him. ’Twouldn’t do for he to know less than all they poor boys.

Another day James called on Mr. Jones. That gentleman was in his garden, and he went out to him.

“ So you’ve come for your peach, Mr. Knightly ; and there it is,” he said, picking some from a tree, laden with beautiful fruit. “ It has been lovely weather this summer for the gardens. ’Tis a real pleasure to see you about and so well again, after that bad illness and accident you met with, though I must say you do look a bit thin still.”

“I’m quite well now, thank you; and your peaches are delicious. I think they beat ours.”

“I think so, too. They’re a better sort. You’ve got none of those. I grafted that tree myself, and ’tis a different sort to any in this county,” said Mr. Jones, highly gratified though, at his visitor’s approbation.

“I am glad to hear you go and look at our school, sometimes,” said the curate.

“Yes, I do; and I must say it’s a real credit to you—I must indeed. I can’t deny it, the boys were in very good order, and seemed to have got a great deal of larning; and I don’t think they work any worse than before—I don’t, indeed. Why, ’twas a lad who goes to your school who cleared all that piece of ground there; and I’ve trusted him to tie up my hollyhocks, with a good deal of looking after, of course, Mr. Knightly. But, as I said afore, I really don’t think as they’s any worse, and it’s wonderful—won-der-ful, surely!”

And so great was his admiration, that Mr. Jones became a subscriber to the school ; and the next summer sent in two large baskets of fruit for the children's tea.

"Well, sir," said the woman, whom the curate had found washing the first day he had opened the school, to him, "I don't see as it gives me much more work, arter all, to send the children ; they don't wear out so many shoes, for sartain, and that most saves the penny a week. They was always quiet children, mine, and I don't think as school have done 'em much harm."

"Sam's at the top of the school most now," said the other woman ; "he always ought to have been, but the parson were jealous of he. But right's right—he've put him up now, so I don't mind his having been used a bit bad to first."

"My dear James," said his mother, "that girl you wished me to take as under house-maid, in the place of the one Alice is going

to have, is coming to me on trial. I have seen her mother, and she promises very fairly ; the only thing I disliked, was her showing me her copy-book. I hope, my dear, you have not set her up out of her place, but I must say she has been taught to work very neatly."

"Your school does fairly, on the whole, I think, Knightly," said Mr. Saxon ; "of course we can't expect it to be equal to ours here ; but you have really worked very hard, and I am sure you will have a reward."

He did not work for praise—it was well he did not ; but he must have worked hard to have won even this. Farmer Stuart's opinion was the prevalent one at Sadbroke—that the present curate was very different to any they had had before ; and by degrees the landowners and farmers gave so liberally to the school, that there was no fear it would become a future drag on Mr. Saxon. And as summer changed into the golden autumn,

came the long-looked-for, long-desired vacation.

It was rather a sad thought to Mr. and Mrs. Knightly, that their only daughter was about to leave them; but they could not desire it otherwise. Hamilton was loved by them almost like a son, and, as far as human beings could venture to say so, hers would be a happy lot.

It was a bright sunny morning—the family were all at home—the boys had not yet returned to school. Hugh was come “for one day only,” he said; “he could not stay longer—he had made an arrangement with a friend to take a tour on the Continent; he might get a glance at his sister and Hamilton.”

The aisle of the old church of Sadborough was strewed with flowers, as the bride walked up, looking very lovely and graceful in her lace veil and wreath of orange blossoms, followed by her train of bridesmaids, chief of whom were Maude and Annie Wilmot. It

was hard on Hugh to see Maude looking so very happy as she did ; it was the first time he had seen her since she gave him the purse, for he had kept out of the way the evening before. He almost wished he had not come down ; but they would have thought it odd of him ; it was much better to get over it ; he had quite enough to do in reading for the law ; and now, when he saw James and her at breakfast together, he did wonder, poor fellow, how he had ever been such a fool !

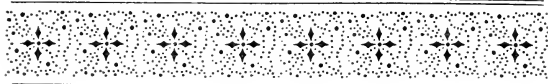
Mr. Saxon performed the ceremony. It was not much the custom to have another clergyman to assist in those days ; but perhaps they thought it was a case in which the knot ought to be tied very tight, for James was there also. It was rather a sad party round the breakfast-table—it was the first parting, and that is always something of a grief, let the occasion be as happy a one as it may ; and even Alice felt it very keenly. But breakfast came to an end, and they must leave ;

and with tears and kisses, and many good wishes, and much love, the young couple set off upon their journey, to begin at the same time the journey of life together, for weal and for woe, for joy and for sorrow, till death do them part, a thought which even then is not to be forgotten. And then the bridesmaids had a good cry, and then tied up the cards and the cake, and then talked over the delightful day it had been, and how lovely dear Alice looked, and how beautiful her lace was, and what an excellent wife she would make, and what a treasure her husband had won, and many like matters. And the gentlemen went out for a walk, James and Hugh going off together; they were rather constrained at first, but that soon wore off. Hugh had to hear all about the sad time of the riot, and the fire, and to ask many questions about his brother's illness, and his parish, and how things were going on. They were both very glad they had met, and seen each

other again ; though the subject nearest the heart of each was not touched upon, and Hugh was not sorry when the next morning he was again on the coach-box of the London mail.

The young couple had a delightful honeymoon ; they went to Paris, and to Geneva, and to Interlachen, and saw everything that travellers see, and confused it very much together ; only bringing home the idea that they had never been so happy in their lives before, and had never seen such wonderful and such beautiful scenery. But then the halo of love was over it all ; it spanned the waterfalls, it crowned the mountains, it rested on the head of "Sov'reign Blanc." But when they returned, happily for themselves, they brought it home with them, and it arched the door of the quiet little house in a suburb of London. And a very happy little house it was, Hugh thought, when he went there, as he frequently did, to spend an evening ; though he would go away with a sigh, think-

ing that nothing of the sort could ever now be his own lot. And a very happy little house James thought it, too, when he came up, as he did, to see them ; and it made him look forward to the time when he also should have one of his own. But he could not marry until he had something better than the curacy of Sadbroke ; and he sometimes feared it would be long before the time would come. But Maude was very young ; her mamma said she would not give her consent to her marrying in less than two years, and by the expiration of that fearfully long time, if they both survived, he might get a living.



CHAPTER XXII.

THE RECTOR OF CLAREVALE.

“MY darling Maude,” said the curate to her the day after Alice’s wedding, as, seeing her in the garden, he went in to assist her in tying up the carnations, “how very disagreeable I must have been to you at Christmas.”

Maude laughed, but did not contradict him ; he would probably not have liked that she should.

“We could none of us make you out at all, James,” she said ; “but you were so busy, how could you have any time to think of me?”

“I was not too busy to be very unhappy,

and to think of you a great deal, though they were very miserable thoughts ; I was a fool, that was the fact," said he emphatically.

"Do hold up this carnation, James," asked Maude. "I have been so busy the last few days, the flowers are all in disorder."

He did as she told him.

"Have you forgiven me though, Maude? Just say that you have, and that you really do love me a little, though I did go on in such a scandalous way—just say you do, Maude."

"How can you be so foolish, James? I am going to say nothing of the sort ; if you cannot tie up the flowers better, you are really of no use here."

"I had a long walk with Hugh, yesterday," he said ; "I am so glad he came down, I was afraid he would not, we were always such good friends, being so very near of an age. I should have been so miserable if anything had happened uncomfortable between us ; but I think he's all right now, poor fellow, and his

excursion abroad will do him a great deal of good."

"What lovely weather for Alice!" said Maude, changing the subject.

"Oh! yes, happy beings that they are; there is no doubt they will enjoy themselves. You will miss Alice very much, Maude."

"Oh! I don't wish Alice back again; she is such a dear girl, and so devoted to her husband; I do think, James, they will be very happy."

"I trust so, my dearest. Oh! Maude, what a long time two years is to look forward to!"

"That holiday yesterday has quite upset you. You are not the least like yourself," said Maude.

"I'm such a lazy fellow," replied he; "there are several places I have to go to, but I saw you in here, and could not resist the temptation of coming in. There is four o'clock striking. I must really go."

But Maude having told him his holiday had

done him harm, would now have gladly induced him to take another, for he was looking very tired.

“You are always in a hurry,” she said.

“I’m not in a hurry, but I made an appointment at four, and have overstayed my time; I shall be in again in the evening.”

And so he was; there was scarcely an evening now that he did not just drop in for a little while, to ask her advice respecting some plan, or to tell her something, or because there was nothing to tell and he wanted to say so, or to hear her speak, or to see her at work, or to look at her, or just—in fact, because he could not keep away.

And time went on, not altogether standing still withal, even with him; he had too much work on hand for that, and summer came round and round again, and it was more than a year and a half since Alice was married.

James came in to the Grange one evening,

as usual, but looking as if he had something more than usual to tell, and with a letter in his hand. He gave it to Maude ; she read it, flushing brightly as she did so, he watching her all the time ; and, as she gave it back, she looked up at him with such a happy, proud look, it was even more to him than the letter. It was from a gentleman of property, whom he knew only by name, but who appeared to know something more of him. He had been at Chesterton, at the time of the trial, and there, seeing and hearing a good deal of the Curate of Sadbroke, determined to offer him the first vacant living in his gift. He now did so. It was a rectory in an adjoining county, at no great distance, a rather large parish, with a pretty church and house ; and he offered it to James, saying, as he did so, that he believed he was fulfilling aright the responsibility that devolved upon him, it being his anxious desire to give the living to one who would truly seek the welfare of those

committed to his charge, and work for the good of souls as in the sight of God.

No wonder that Maude looked proud and happy; it was very delightful that James should be so appreciated; she knew well how very, very good he was, but she liked that others should know it too.

“And now, dearest!” said he, “you will not let me go alone? There must be no more delay, Maude.”

And Maude did not say there must.

“It is a very great responsibility, though,” he said, after awhile, “a very tremendous responsibility. I wonder whether others feel these things as I do? I hardly knew, when I entered the ministry, what an awful thing it is to stand up before God, to preach his word to the people; had I fully understood it, I should almost have shrunk from the task; but there is no work like it, and you will help me Maude. You are still so young, it seems almost wrong yet to place you in the

midst of the stern realities of life ; but you will not shrink from it, dearest—you will be my help and comfort, will you not ?”

She always felt a little awed when he spoke so solemnly, but she was accustomed to it ; all his feelings were very deep, and even his earthly love was carried up higher : they must be one in work and in faith—nothing less would satisfy him.

“ You must teach me, James,” she murmured. “ I can never help you, but I can always live for you, and try to be your comfort.”

“ And my best earthly blessing !” he said. “ We shall be very happy Maude, if God will !”

After awhile the letter was shown to Mrs. Wilmot. She had been expecting to hear that she must soon part with her daughter, and she gave her promise that there should be no unnecessary delay. Mr. Knightly was very proud indeed of the honour that had been

paid his son ; the living was a very good one, and the way in which it was offered enhanced the value of the gift.

Mr. Saxon had to be told he must look out for another curate.

“I knew it would be so, Knightly,” he said ; “and where am I to get one who will do the work ? When you came to Sadbroke there was only one full service on Sunday ; now there are two, besides your evening service on Wednesday, and the lecture here. There was no school, and that has to be looked after ; besides, you have visited so much amongst all classes,” he continued, “it won’t do to go back ; and there is your evening class here, I shall not, myself, like that given up now, but where I am to find a man who will do the work, I am sure I can’t tell. You reformers always forget those who are to come after you. There is Mr. Grey, he has been changing several times, and, I hear, is doing nothing now ; but I’d rather do the

work myself, than get into all that hot water once more !”

James thought a college friend of his would undertake the work.

“ Which really, Mr. Saxon, is very little,” he said. “ I was not very strong the first year after my accident, and since then I fear I have been very idle. I shall have to work much harder at Clarevale.”

“ Don’t kill yourself or your curate, if you keep one,” was the reply. “ I suppose your wife will look after you ; but I pity that poor young man.”

But before parting, the rector warmed a little.

“ I congratulate you sincerely on your good fortune, James,” he said, “ and wish you every happiness, which I believe no one deserves more than you ; and I trust that God will prosper all your undertakings, as I am sure has been the case here. We shall miss you very much.”

And James felt leaving very much, though he had been looking forward to it for some time. He could not part from a place in which he had taken so much interest, without doing so.

His friend came to Sadbroke, and did very well, though it was somewhat of an ordeal to come after one who had been such a favourite ; and it was some time before the people were reconciled to the change.

It was a quiet wedding. Hugh was not present ; he said he was unavoidably prevented. They were sorry he still felt his disappointment so keenly ; but it was rather the way with the Knightlys—they were quiet people, who did not talk much about themselves—they were not accustomed to call in the world, and his wife, too, to witness their troubles and sorrows. So, of course, they had none, in the world's belief ; nevertheless they cut deep furrows in the heart sometimes, for all that.

Mr. Knightly gave his daughter-in-law a

very pretty little carriage, suitable for the black colt, a colt, however, now no longer, but a very handsome black horse—"Quiet enough," said the Rector of Clarevale, "for Maude to drive."

Well, if she ever did attempt anything of the sort it is to be hoped she was merciful; she was certainly mistress of himself and his owner, and could do nearly what she liked. She looked very soft and pretty, sitting with the reins in her hands; and if ever she did attempt to pull too hard, there is very little doubt that she was soon informed of it.

Sally Martin went with them as cook. She was a very good girl, and after a time married a respectable young farmer of the neighbourhood.

The Christmas after the wedding a happy party met at Fairleigh. Hugh came down. Annie Wilmot was nearly the age Maude had been when this story opens, and extremely

like her. “Twin cherries” their mamma called them ; but there is always some difference in individual character. Annie was somewhat less gentle and more piquante than Maude ; and the young barrister was soon in her toils. But then he took care this time to see that they were really laid for himself ; and, finding the great difference when such was the case, was quite ready to laugh over what he called “the infatuation of those old days.”

James was able to stay and preach one Sunday at Sadbroke, to an overflowing congregation. Maude flushed, and looked wonderfully pleased and happy, as she came out of church on his arm ; and he spoke to the people—who all waited for a word from him. Short as his visit necessarily was, he found time to call on all ; and very much surprised and delighted they were to find that Mr. Knightly had not forgotten them, nor Mrs. Knightly either.

And then the Christmas party broke up ;

Alice and Hamilton to return to the little house in the London suburb, and Hugh to go back to his chambers, to read harder than ever, for now indeed his lamp of love was also burning very bright, and, kept fed by a constant correspondence, was not likely to go out.

“I am so glad that dear, good Hugh is rewarded at last,” said Alice Hamilton to her husband. “James never meant any harm, but he really did not act rightly that Christmas. Do you know, William, I sometimes think he is very proud.”

“Not proud, Alice,” said he, who would never hear a word against James; “but when a man loves with all his heart, he likes to have a whole heart in return; there are very few like your brother, rely upon it.”

“I am very fond of James, indeed, and I know how very good he is; but he does expect a great deal.”

“Because he gives a great deal. Maude is a very happy woman, Alice. Hugh is a

great favourite of mine, but no one who knew James could give Hugh the preference."

"Oh! that would have been utterly impossible, for James and Maude loved one another from children; but he was very foolish that Christmas, and I am truly thankful that dear, good Hugh is rewarded at last."

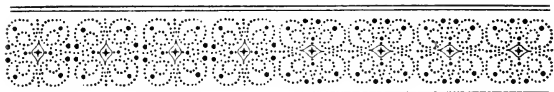
Alice would have the last word, and her husband, being a wise man, let her. They do not live in the little house in a suburb, now. It has been exchanged for a handsome one in a good square; and if Baron Hamilton's name is not yet heard on the bench, why, it may be ere long; and Hugh Knightly, Q.C., is well known on circuit.

James and Maude left when the others did, and returned to the pretty rectory of Clarevale. Cecil, at his own particular request, went with them, to read with his brother for a year before going to college. In due course of time he became James' curate, and, as years went on, found other work.

It had certainly been his brother's example that had influenced him in his choice of a profession ; and who can say how far such influence extended either in his own family, or in others with whom he was brought in contact. It will never be known in this life.

There is no need to speak of his happiness—it was built on a sure foundation ; therefore, now that he is settled in his new home to pass through life, not without trials and anxieties—for from such things none are exempted—but with many blessings, and work enough even to satisfy his craving for it, and with Maude for the sunshine of his life, we take leave of the Curate of Sadbroke.





CHAPTER XXIII.

CONCLUSION.

SO James Knightly did not go abroad as a missionary after all, but Jack Martin did. It came about in this way. When James Knightly left Sadbrooke, it was a great change for Jack ; the new curate was a zealous, hardworking, Christian man, but he was not his own particular personal friend, the one who had stood by him when so many forsook him. So after a time he went to chapel, and made acquaintance with serious people who belonged to the dissenting community ; and then the longing, anxious desire came upon him to preach that truth which once he

despised ; and there being, in those days, no opening for him to do so in connexion with the Church, he went about and preached Christ crucified in the neighbouring chapels, wherever there was a door opened to him.

Many who lived before him, and many since, too, have looked on the words “ Follow me ! ” once spoken to the fishermen of Galilee, as the highest of all consecration ; and believing that the same words, impressed deeply by the Spirit of God on any mind of man, are not less the Master’s call than when spoken audibly by his own lips upon earth, have gone forth with that calling alone, and have found their work followed with abundant blessing.

Of this number was Jack Martin. He went out as a missionary, in connexion with a dissenting community. Nanny would rather he had stayed at home, she liked to have her son near, “ He was such a comfort to them all ! ” she said. But Job was rather proud of his boy’s attainments, and, attached as he was

himself to the Church, had often gone to hear him preach before he left.

Many called him a lazy, worthless fellow, who had never had any good in him, and who disliked work. They would have little liked, themselves, to have undertaken the heavy and weary work that the self-denying missionary was called to. He was no political dissenter, it was only circumstances that had made him a dissenter at all ; and when, after the manner of his class, he would tell, as was his wont, the story of his early life, and of his conversion, he would always say that it was to a Church minister that, under God, he owed the blessing. And that minister did not forget him ; twice a year, regularly, did the lonely missionary receive a letter of counsel, comfort, and Christian affection, from the rector of a certain parish in England.

“There was a time,” was said in one of these letters, “when I thought of undertaking missionary work myself ; but though I be-

lieve I may truly say I was desirous of doing the Lord's work, I did not seek it with the same simple mind and single eye as you did, and so the time passed by. Now, I cannot, I do not desire to change; I have much, very much work here: there are the ignorant to instruct, the broken-hearted to be bound up, the poor to whom the Gospel is to be preached, at home as well as abroad. But when I look around on the mercies and the comforts God has given me, on the blessing he has vouchsafed on my work, and then think of you carrying the cross into heathen lands, with oftentimes no one to speak a word of kindness, or of Christian sympathy, with so little visible fruit to be seen as the result of your labours—when I think on all this, I feel, indeed, that I must sit down at your feet, good brother, for surely I have chosen the lower place!"

And the answer came in due course. After detailing missionary work, it went on to say :

“ When I think of my early life, and of my now being permitted to unite in this great work, the privilege indeed seems a marvellous one.

“ Oh ! Mr. Knightly, how often do I look back. I remember you quite young as you then were ; I remember, when after a severe illness, from which you were scarcely recovered, you left your comfortable home, where you might have been well attended and cared for, and left happiness, which, as you told me afterwards, you scarcely even then understood to be yours, it was so new.

“ I remember how you left all this, and the flock you so truly loved—leaving, even literally, the ninety and nine in the wilderness, to look after that which was lost, and came seeking two poor boys.

“ And I remember the evening, when it seemed to me as if death might be very near ; and when a horror of great darkness had come upon me, how you knelt by my side on the

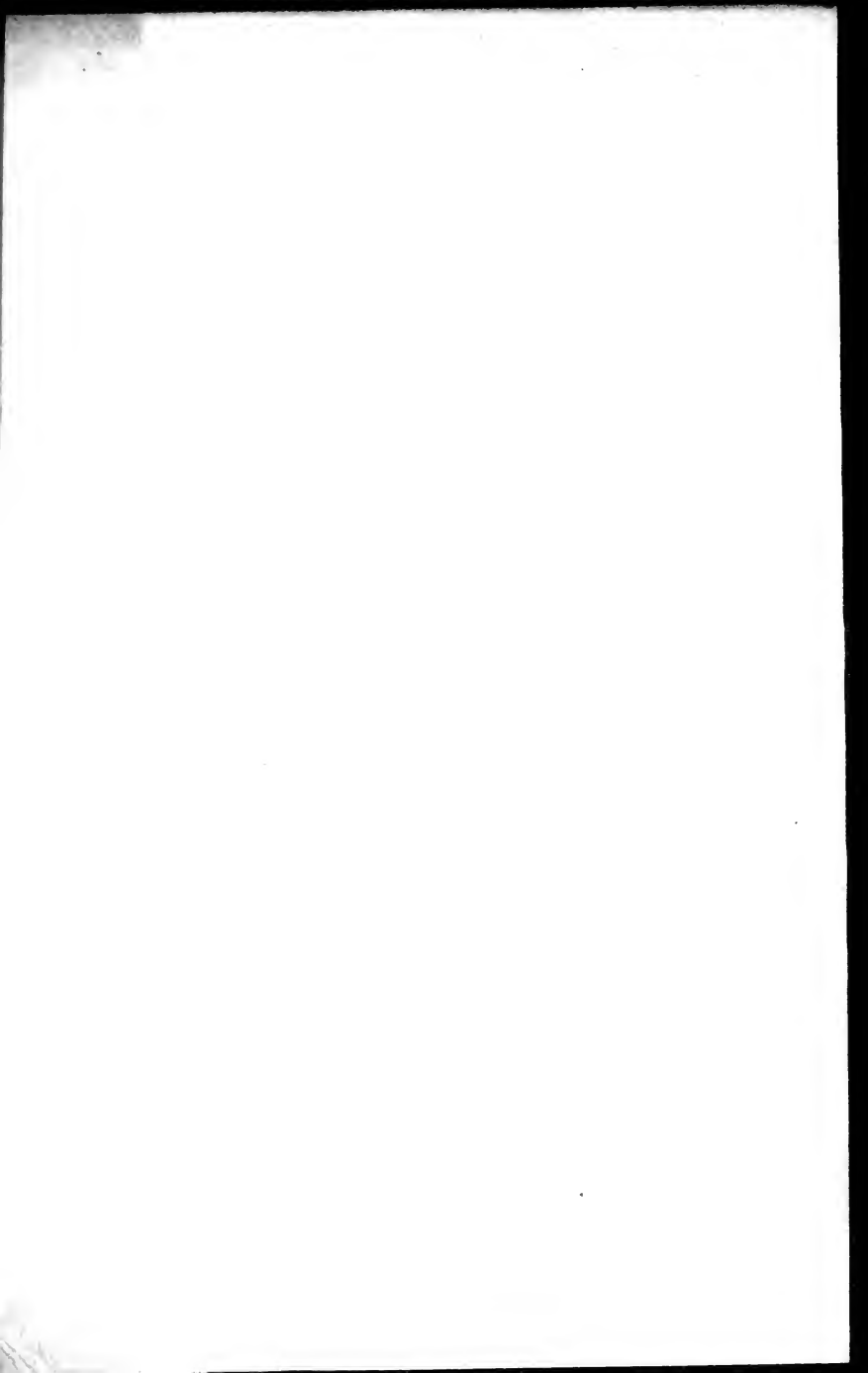
cold floor of the little prison cell in the gaol at Chesterton, and prayed that, whether for life or death, there might be a blessing for me still. And I believe, and ever have believed, that, through your prayers, the blessing came. And if, as I humbly trust will be the case, through my instrumentality the Gospel shall be planted in this spot, it will be the effect of the seed then sown—‘Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth. But when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth up great branches, so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it.’ ”

And so they work on. Many who know the eloquent and intellectual rector, and dare not do other than revere the religion which shines so brightly in him, will yet call the

lonely missionary an ignorant and idle man. And others who, knowing him, can respect him for his self-denial, and his work, will talk of fat livings, and idle parish priests, knowing equally little of what they are talking about. But they neither of them work for the world's praise, and so heed not the world's blame. They grieve and mourn over the ignorance that will not believe, and pray that the light may come down, and shine into all hearts. They are willing to bear the burden and heat of the day, if so be that at the end to each may be addressed the blessed words—"Ye have been faithful in a few things, be thou ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!"

THE END.





UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA



3 0112 041776102